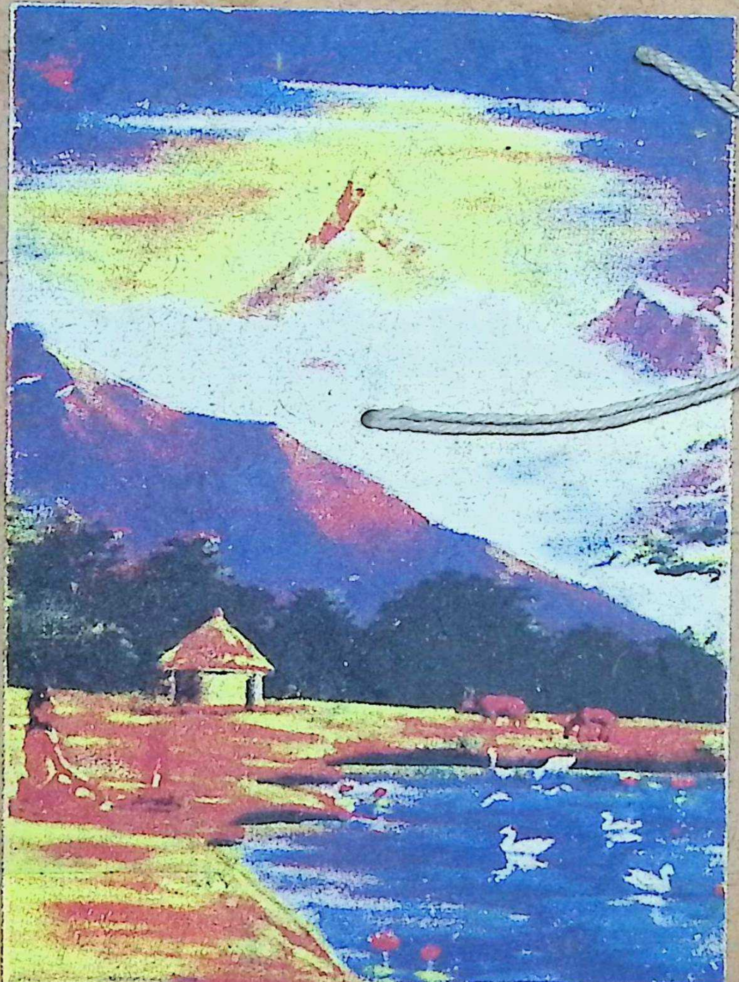
Hindu Philosophy

Practical and Moral Values



Gyanendra Pr. Adhikari "Hanson"

Pause for a moment!!

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My humble effort to print the book on this paper is to boost the income of the poor, use indigenous materials and to make Nepal self sufficient. There are flaws in the paper which I am sure will improve as sales increase and manufactures will be encouraged to find new technique to overcome them.

The beauty of this paper is its long lasting durability which can withstand use, as it is ages. No insects can destory it and it lasts for a long time. This paper has been used in Nepal since ancient times and continues to be used in all official correspondence of the government. This paper can be classified as Nepal's unique cultural heritage which should be preserved and promoted.

Hindu Philosophy

Practical and Moral Values

Gyanendra Prasad Adhikari "Hanson"

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ACC. No
26777

Title: Hindu Philosophy

Published By: Gyanendra Prasad Adhikari "Hanson"

First Edition: 2015 (1000 Copies)

978-9937-2-9624-3

ISBN No.: ~~9802021234~~

Legal Advisor: Dr. Radhashyam Parajuli, Advocate

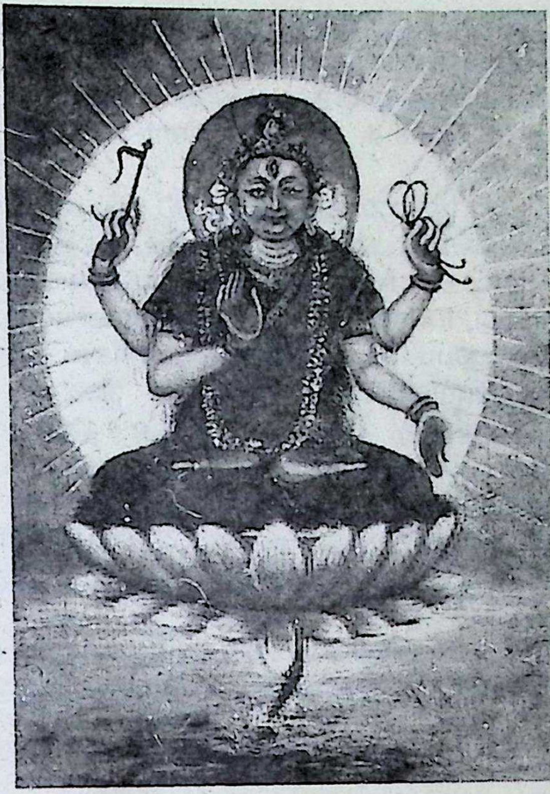
Cover Design: Ram Bahadur Thada

Layout Design: Raju Haldar

Artist: Ram Bahadur Thada

Price: Rs. 1500.00

This book is dedicated to Mother Nature.



Mother Nature is the creator and preserver of the universe whose omnipresent power we can see and experience. Without her love and mercy we cannot progress in the journey of life. It is also dedicated to her children who made Hindu Society not only an ideal society, but also one that is filled with many pertinent philosophical, practical, and moral values that we must uphold.

PRAYER TO MOTHER NATURE

Thank you, Mother Nature, for blessing me so profusely in the journey of life. Please continue to shower your mercy and blessings on me. Help me to always praise and glorify your name in whatever I do. Help me to be kind, loving, patient and understanding with whomever I interact.

Mother, you have brought me into this world for a purpose. Show me the plan that you have for me, so that I may follow it accordingly. Thank you for making me a citizen of such a beautiful country. Thank you for giving me a warm and comfortable home, a loving family and good health. Mother, you have delivered me from ignorance to enlightenment. You have blessed me mentally, physically and spiritually. Thank you. Fill me with positive energy, so that wherever I go I may serve joy, happiness and love. Help me to serve my country and countrymen in this journey of life. Please be with the sick, the suffering, the poor, the needy, the hungry, the weary and the aged. Please be with anyone that needs you in any way.

Mother, as I go about the various activities of life, please be with me in whatever I do. Thank you, Mother Nature, for everything.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This present work book is a translation of a book written by me in Nepali. The Nepali title was "Hindu Samaj Vhyawaharik, Naitik ra Darshanik." It was the outcome of various articles that I had written in a weekly newspaper about the heritage, culture and many lore legends and myths of Kathmandu valley and its surroundings.

As my weekly articles were being published, I felt it would be relevant to put drawings related to the articles. I felt articles without pictures were like pickle without salt. Absolutely tasteless! One day, while contemplating on this matter, I met a young emerging artist, Mr. Ram *Bahadur Thada*, at B.K Art gallery in Kathmandu. I asked him if he would draw some pictures for my articles. Without hesitation, he smiled and agreed.

Every week after I wrote my articles I used to wonder what to write next. One day like an answer to my prayer I was inspired to write on a particular and significant aspect of Hinduism. So I started to write whatever little I knew and heard about Hinduism from my friends and acquaintances. While writing the articles many questions arose in my mind as to why Hindus shaved their head when someone died, name giving ceremony or the reason for the rice feeding ceremony, wearing the *Janai* and so on. These rites of passage which Hindus have to undergo indicate birth initiation, maturation, marriage, old age and eventually death. I thought there must be some logical reason for observing all these rituals. So I started to search for answers and asked many people but seldom got satisfying answers. I became so serious about the Hindu way of life and its rituals that I started searching from pillar to post, trying to find scholars who knew their actual meaning.

As my articles aroused interest in my readers, I was encouraged to compile them in a book form. To write a weekly column was one thing, but to write a book was completely another and I wanted my readers to get the truth. So I started searching for scholars who would read my manuscripts. I was mysteriously guided to *Baldev Juju's* house, the founding Chairman of Nepal Vedic Academy. After interacting with him, I asked if he would read my manuscript and guide me. He happily smiled and agreed to help me. In my interaction with him, I learnt many more interesting facts. In my search for scholars I also had the honor of meeting Giridhar Bhatta, to whom also I showed my manuscripts. He also gave me his suggestions and opinions, which I added in the book. I am also highly obliged to former Secretary of the Government of Nepal Mr. Shree Krishna Gautam who read the manuscripts many times and gave me his suggestions. I was contemplating on the cover of my book and spoke to Ram about it. He told me since he had done all the pictures for the book, he would design the cover. And it is superb! My friend, philosopher and guide, Dr. Professor *Prem* Raman *Uprety*, was always there as an angel, guiding me in my writing endeavors. Thank you, Doc.

Thank you, respected Baldev Juju, for guiding me. Without your help, it would not have been possible for this book to see the light of day. I would also like to thank you from the core of my heart for writing the Foreword.

INTRODUCTION

According to Hinduism, all human beings possess three kinds of *Gunas* or virtues. They are *Satgoond, Rajgoond* and *Tamgoond*. All human thoughts and actions are controlled by these three virtues. The virtues of *Satgoond* are kindness, love and compassion. The virtues of *Rajgoondness* are self-centeredness and selfishness and *Tamgoond* is blindness or ignorance. So in our everyday life it is recommended that we maintain a good balance of these *Gunas* or virtues in order to be successful in the journey of life. If any one of these virtues dominates us more than others, there will be trouble in our lives. According to Hinduism, even the gods are bound by these virtues.

Janmana jayate shudra:
Sanskarad dwij uchyate:

This means that every human being, born in this world, is raw and innocent. They become good and responsible only after the various rituals and sacraments have been performed on them. The broad meaning of the above verse is: Every human being, at the time of his or her birth, is like a lump of clay without any shape or form. They start taking form only after various sacraments have been performed on them. A newborn child is like a piece of gold ore found in a mine without any luster, shape or form filled with many impurities. Only after the ore has been put in the fire and all the impurities removed, it will shine like gold. Likewise, when diamond is found in a mine, it is black and formless, but after it has been cleaned, cut and polished, it becomes dazzling and is fit to be worn on a crown, ring or any other jewel prized by human beings. Likewise, when these sacraments are performed on human beings they are being cleaned and refined. That is why so many rituals and sacraments are performed on a Hindu, from birth to death, to make them a perfect and an able human being, so that they can travel the journey of life successfully. Hindus in the past used to perform more than fifty sacraments and rituals, but now most of them observe only sixteen or twelve. Such rituals start from *Namakaran* and end with the death rites. The sacraments, customs and festivities of the Hindus are their cultural heritage, which identifies them as Hindus from the rest of the world. They also speak of the language, art, literature, culture and the way of life of the Hindus.

The word Sanskrit is derived from two words: *San* means good and *Kriti* means work. When these two words are joined together, they become Sanskrit, which means to do good work. Thus Sanskrit means to do good work. Good work in Hinduism means setting up a society that is based on love, peace, harmony, gratitude, respect and unity. These are the foundations of the Hindu cultural heritage. According to the Hindu scriptures, a person is born as a human being after taking more than eight million births and deaths of different living beings. So to a Hindu to be born as a human being is very precious, because only a human being has the intelligence of freeing themselves from the cycle of births and deaths and get eternal salvation or *Moksha*. So it is the duty of every Hindu to live a perfect life by being an ideal human being through their thoughts, actions and behavior as long as they live in the world. An ideal Hindu, right from the time they get up in the morning till they go to bed remember with reverence their country, its great leaders, their ancestors and all the things that help them to pass the journey of life smoothly. It is a society, which is rich in music, art and literature. Without the development and progress of a country's cultural heritage, it is considered an uncivilized society.

While writing this book, I read many books and interacted with many learned people and scholars on Hinduism. People, who do not understand the basis of Hinduism, frown and laugh at Hindus, for observing so many sacraments, rituals and festivities. This is because of their ignorance of Hinduism and its traditions. They do not realize that these ceremonies and celebrations are performed to assist a person in achieving perfection. It is also performed to show others the value of these rituals, because all of them have great meanings and lessons. The more I read and learned about Hinduism, the more it attracted me to study it in depth. That is why I have made a humble attempt to explain some of the more important rituals and sacraments.

A nation does not slip into oblivion when it is conquered by an outside power, but it begins to die when it loses its culture and civilization. So if Hindus forget and discard their art, literature, music and cultural values, they lose their identity. Keeping these thoughts in mind and to protect and preserve the rich cultural heritage of Hinduism, I thought of writing this book. Loss of cultural heritage means loss of the heritage of their own as well as that of their ancestors. The identity of the great *Rishis* and Sages, who handed down these rituals and customs for the benefit and progress of all human beings, also faces extinction. The most wonderful aspect of Hinduism is that it is filled with love, peace, harmony and tolerance. And it is because of these qualities, that it unites far-flung family members, friends, and other well-wishers together to celebrate various sacraments, rituals and festivals. When they are together, they share their joys and sorrows and exchange their experiences. Rituals and sacraments of the Hindus are a platform to renew their love and friendship.

The philosophical, practical and moral values of a Hindu society are not a few hundred years, but thousands of years. They are based on the findings and experiences of our ancestors, the *Rishis* and Sages, from the earliest times. Hindus enthusiastically prepare to celebrate a feast or festival many days before the ceremony, because they have grown up with them from their childhood. It is for these reasons that I started writing this small book, which is an attempt to understand and create awareness about a very vast and interesting subject. So, what I have written are my own findings. They may not agree with many of the traditions and ways followed by many Hindu sects, castes, tribes and ethnic groups, because all of them have adapted ways most suitable to them.

Therefore, the methods may be different, but the ultimate goal is the same. I hope this humble effort of mine will encourage learned scholars to take such research forward. I welcome any constructive criticism and healthy comments to further better my book. Critical suggestions, comments and appreciation are welcomed, so that my future writings will bear the mark of your expert comments.

Hinduism is not a religion

Hinduism is not a religion but an ideal way of life that is filled with spiritualism based on the six philosophical schools of thought as mentioned in the *Vedas*. In these days of aping western modernity and running after materialism, there is erosion in understanding the meaning of Hindu sacraments and practicing them. There are well mentioned meanings for every ritual and sacrament as prescribed in the Vedas, and other ancient Hindu scriptures. With some effort and study, one can understand their true significance. The four main Vedas, Upanishads, and other scriptures, which are ancient and ageless, have prescribed these sacraments and rituals keeping in view the welfare of all human beings and maintaining universal peace as a whole. Hinduism is not the outcome of Aryan invasion of the Indian Sub Continent as is widely believed. It is an ideal way of life that was developed by the learned and knowledgeable people from the south, who lived close to the sea and exposed to sunshine, and those highly spiritual practitioners who lived in the Himalayan hills and caves. Both these spiritually enlightened groups met in the *Vindhya* Mountains that separates South India from the Northern Himalayas. Both these groups from the north and the south were highly knowledgeable and their combined knowledge as encoded in the Vedas and other Hindu scriptures, have been the results of their spiritual, social and cultural experience and their ability to look into the future. Their highly developed minds could see the existing and non-existing things. They believed in rebirth and knew the constraints of transmigration.

The composition of materials, the enormous strength of an atom, the existence of the five elements, the effect of the weather and sunrays, the movement of planets, the human biology and psychology, the plant pathology, all were understood by them. They knew the length and breadth of *Yugas* or ages. The present *Kali Yuga* is under the spell of *Kali. Kali* means dark or the age of the wicked when spiritual values are getting degenerated and eventually the world will come to an end.

Hinduism preaches love, peace, harmony and unity. Hinduism never supported the caste system. It has only identified the classes of people depending on their professions. The priest class, which was to protect the dharma, became selfish and is responsible for the deterioration of values in the Hindu society in the name of religion. They had encouraged differences and divided the society, to retain their supremacy. Because of their high-handedness Hindu society broke up into different sects like Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism and so on. Subsequently because of their division and disunity the foreign invaders exploited this weakness of the Hindu society.

Under the tenets of Hinduism, every event in life is celebrated with rituals and sacraments. Birth is a happy event, which is celebrated with much joy. Likewise the first rice feeding ceremony to an infant that is *Annaprasana* is celebrated. Introduction of a child to education *Aksharabhyas* is celebrated.

Upanayanam or wearing of the sacred thread for the first time is celebrated. The nine strands in the *Yagnopavet* represent the nine energies. The first menstruation of a female child is celebrated. The whole celebration and sacraments attached to those 12 days of isolation of a girl in a dark room is a lesson to her to know about the physical changes she has undergone, and the exposure to sun on the 12th day is an indication of her enlightenment to the realities of life as a female. The *Tika* or the sacred dot on the forehead at the confluence of the eyebrows is meant to keep the knowledge center protected and active. The various rituals during the wedding ceremony have definite meanings. They are symbolic of the whole life process. All the four stages of life consist of - *Balya*, (student) *Grista*, (house holder) *Vanaprasthan*, (detachment) and *Sanyas,* (spiritual life). There is also a special ceremony held when a person reaches 84 years of age, which signifies that they have lived a successful life and have seen 1000 full moons. *Shradha* ceremony held by the Hindus is in reverence to their departed ancestors. They also respect the various plants, trees, birds and animals by giving them godly forms. Not only that, they even respect the *Shaligram* fossil stone as God Vishnu. So it can be said that Hindus are very tolerant and patient. They give respect and honor to all the things of the world.

जि.प्र.का काठमाडौं द.नं ३०५-०५२ ५३

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वैदिक प्रतिष्ठान
VEDIC ACADEMY
(स्थापित : वि.सं.२०५२)

काठमाडौं, नेपाल

May 6, 2015

FOREWORD

Gyanendra Prasad Adhikari, popupularly known as "Hanson", is by nature a very inquisitive person. He wants to know in depth, why Hindus practice so many religious ceremonies, rituals and their innermost secrets. He intensely searches for scholars versed in these subjects and discusses with them unceasingly the reasons for observing them. He would also search for books and manuscripts related to the subjects and consult them. The result of all this research is the book you are holding in your hand.

He does not believe in depending only on the scriptural matters regarding the cultural practices of Hinduism. He lays emphasis on the fact that there must be hidden philosophical and moral values based on them to make human beings better. He also believes there must be practical values behind the rituals celebrations.

It is written in the scriptures that if a person does righteous deeds, they go to Heaven and if they do evil, they go to Hell. But no one has come back from Heaven or from Hell to narrate the bliss of Heaven or the fury of Hell. A living being enjoys the bliss of Heaven and the fury of Hell, because he is made up of the five elements. But once he dies his physical body consisting of the five elements is turned into ashes. So, how can such a person enjoy the bliss of Heaven or the fury of Hell? If a person does not have eyes, how can they distinguish what is beautiful or ugly and if they do not have a tongue how they can taste what is sweet or sour. Likewise, if a person does not have the five active organs and the five senses and the conscience to know what is good or bad, what is the use of going to Heaven? So why should a person do righteous deeds only with the hope of going to Heaven? There is no answer to this question.

It is the duty of the enlightened not to paint rosy pictures of Heaven or depict the horrors of Hell, because this will misinterpret the true meaning of the scriptures. In order not to believe in the scriptures blindly, Mr. *Adhikari* has tried in this book to give the true meaning of the various aspects of Hinduism. Even though he has presented his thoughts in the book, we should not think they are complete. This is his presentation to the readers of what Hinduism is and not to follow it without understanding them. In this materialistic and fast paced world there is hardly any time for spiritualism. I think Mr. *Adhikari* has tried to find out the various reasons for believing and following the Hindu way of life. It is only his attempt and I want to thank him from the core of my heart for his effort.

Baldev Juju

Founder president Vedic Academy

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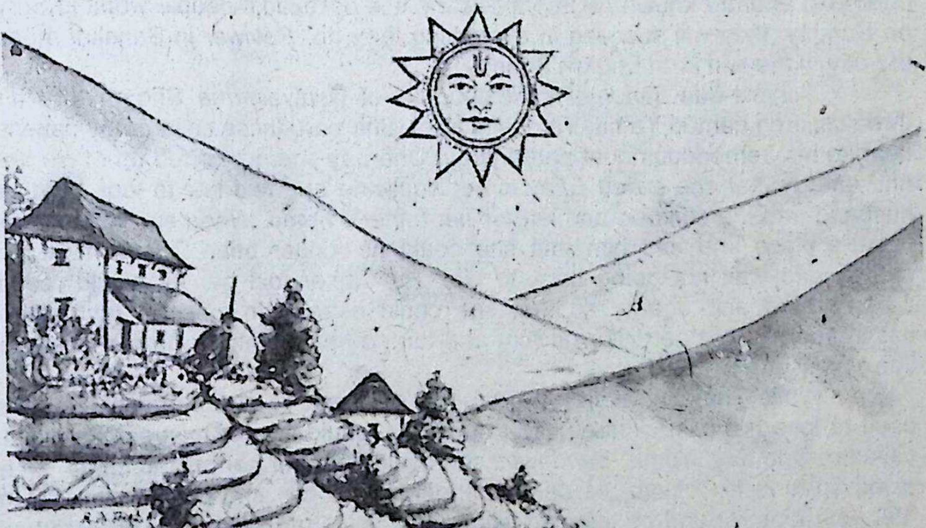
Surya: The almighty

The daylight Sun or Surya the ruler of the day not only removes darkness from the world, but also gives us heat, light and energy. We can't imagine what our lives would be if he did not remove the darkness. The world would be a cold, dark and a desolate place without any movement and life. The sages during the Vedic period knew his importance in their lives so they gave him a human form to honor him. He is red in color with three eyes and four hands. Two of his hands are holding a lotus flower, the third is giving blessings and the fourth is removing fear and anxiety.

Surya is the son of Sage *Kashyap* and Aditi. His realm is known as *Suryalok*. He sits on a lotus flower and bright rays shine out of him. He is so important to the Hindus that many verses praising him have been composed. Amongst the many, *Gayatri* Mantra is the foremost and popular.

Every day early in the morning a Hindu devotee should look at the rising Surya and recite the *Gayatri* Mantra. He is so highly respected by them that one of the strands of the cotton cord they wear around their neck, represents him. Every morning they must wash this chord and remember him with reverence. In the holy Hindu scripture, Yazurved, it is written:

Hiranyen Sabita Rathena Devo Yati Bhuwanani Pashyan:



This means, every day Surya sits on a golden chariot and looks after the welfare of the world.

Among the many festivals, Hindus celebrate in honor of Surya are *Maghe Sankranti* and *Chath*. Since the dawn of time every civilization has experienced and known the importance of Surya that is why they have revered and given him a special place in their lives. Hindu women pray to him asking for children, prosperity, good health and many other things. In some societies he is revered with 21 names and in others 108 names. Some of his most popular names are Ravi, *Diwakar*, *Saharsransu, Bhaskar* and so on. He looks after the welfare of the whole world, including man, animals, birds, plants and all living things. The Vedas describe his importance thus:

Surya Atma Jagatistaisthushscha:

This means that Surya is not only the soul of all living beings that move, but also the soul of all living plants that do not move? His rays are so powerful that even if a person suffering from an incurable disease sings his praises will be cured. There is an interesting story to prove this fact.

There was a person called *Mayur* who was driven out by the society because he suffered from leprosy. In his frustration Mayur started writing one hundred verses praising *Surya* and glorifying him. As he kept writing the verses his disease slowly started disappearing and by the time he had written the last verse, he was completely cured from the disease. Later, these very verses were published and are known as Surya *Sathak*. It is believed if people worship *Surya* on Sunday, they will succeed in everything they do. *Raviwar* in Sanskrit means the day of the sun or in English Sunday.

Surya's wife *Sandhya* is the daughter of *Vishwakarma*. She gave birth to three children named Yama, Yami and Sani. She bore these children by patiently bearing his tremendous heat and energy. One day she got so fed up of his heat and energy that she called *Chayan* her duplicate and told her to look after her husband and the children and left for her father's home. When she reached her father's place and told him that she could no longer bear *Surya's* heat and energy and was not going back to him. Her father told her he would reduce *Surya's* heat and energy so that she could bear it. In spite of her father's assurance she did not listen to him and turned herself into a mare and started living alone.

While Chayan *was* living with Surya she gave birth to three children. She used to love her own children very much, but would always mistreat *Sandhya's* children. One day, *Yama, Sandhya's* son could not bear her mistreatment, so he stood up to kick *Chayan*. As he was about to kick her, she cursed him. Saying "Let your legs rot and be infected with maggots." After hearing his stepmother's curse, he went crying to his father and told him about her curse. While listening to his son's story, Surya thought to himself, how could a mother curse her own child in such a terrible manner? So he called Chayan and asked her who she was. After hearing her story, Surya went to his father in-law and asked him "Where is my wife?"

Surry's father in-law told him that his wife had come and complained about him. He had advised her to go back home but didn't know anything further. Surya was surprised with his father-in-law's reply and began think where could *Sandhya* be and started to meditate. While meditating, he saw her in the form of a mare living in a forest. He turned himself into a stallion and went to meet her. While living together in the forest *Sandhya* gave birth to twins named *Aswanikumar.* After divorcing *Chayan,* he cajoled and convinced Sandhaya to go back to Suryalok with him. Only after *Vishwakarma* reduced *Surya's* energy to one eighth of what it was, *Sandhaya* was able to live with him.

It is said every day seven horses draw the chariot of Surya from the east to the west. Some say it is not seven horses but a horse with seven heads. The names of the horses are *Gayatri, Kakuv, Usnik, Jagati, Tristum,* Anistup and Pankti. The seven colors of the rainbow represent these horses. It is also believed different personalities accompany Surya in his chariot. They are *Rishi* Muni (sages), Gandarva (musicians), Pare (angels), Yakchya (giants), Nags (docile snakes) and *Rakchyas* (demons).

We cannot only identify the east and the west directions of the world because of Surya but also the south. He gave this direction to *Kashyap Rishi* as an offering for the way he performed a *Yagya* organized by him. In Sanskrit the offering given to a priest is called *Dakchina,* which literally means the southern direction.

When Surya rises in the morning his color is red. At noon it is white and at dusk it is bluish black. Twelve rays shine out of him. These rays represent the twelve months of a year. All of them have not only different names but also have different powers. The first ray is called *Indra,* which means power. That is why *Indra* is the king of the gods. The second is *Dhata,* which means patience. The third is *Bhaga,* which means fate. The fourth is *Pusha,* which means nourishment. The fifth is *Mitra,* which means heat. The sixth is *Varun,* which means water. The seventh is *Yama,* meaning death. The eighth is Amsu, which means light. The ninth is *Vayu,* meaning air. The tenth is *Savita,* which means creation. The eleventh is *Twasta,* which means art and the twelfth is Vishnu, meaning universal light. The Hindu sages knew the importance of the different colors of the rays of Surya that is why they gave them the names of their gods and worshipped him thrice a day.

The philosophical aspect of Surya is that he is an indispensable part of all living beings. Without him nothing survives in the world. Can we imagine what our lives would be like, if he did not shine? All activities would cease and everything would come to a standstill and death would hover over the world. Even on a sunny day if the sky suddenly gets dark, we panic and wonder what's going to happen. Honoring and respecting Surya not only gives us knowledge, but also gives us strength. The knowledge and strength we get from him should not be misused for evil deeds which causes harm but used for kind deeds which makes us honorable human beings .

The practical importance of Surya, in our lives is that he removes darkness and gives us heat, light and energy. Nothing in the world can survive without him. That is why in gratitude for Suray's gift, the *Rishi Munis* every morning at dawn welcomed him by reciting the *Gayatri* Mantra in praise of him.

In the past, the *Rishi* Muni's rose before the first rays of Surya could be seen. They bathed and cleaned themselves then gazed at *Surya's* rising red rays and recited the *Gayatri* Mantra. The reason for gazing at this ray is to gain knowledge. Without knowledge, we cannot succeed in anything we do. After that they did the twelve postures of Surya *Namaskar*. It is said after doing these postures no other exercise is needed to keep us hale and hearty. All the rays' of Surya do not have the same benefits. Natural therapy doctors know the healing powers of the different colors of Surya. That is why they make patients suffering from all kinds of diseases gaze at different colors. They put water in different colored bottles and expose them to Surya and prescribe these colors to the patents according to their disease. This kind of healing is called color therapy. Amongst the most beneficial colors for mankind, is the first red color at dawn which gives us knowledge. The white color at mid-day gives us energy and its setting bluish black color gives us maturity. That is why the *Rishi Munis* used to meditate on these colors three times a day. The ultra violet ray of the sun cures many diseases and also destroys many types of bacteria.

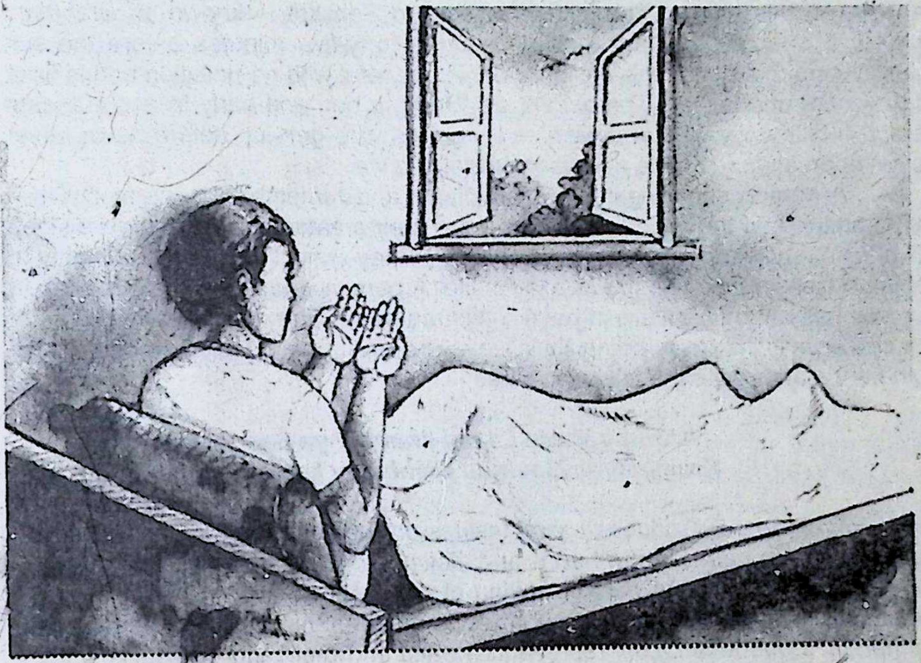
When a person feels weak and lazy, he is advised to lie in the sun and take an oil massage. This is because there is vitamin "D" in the heat of Surya, which gives energy and strength to a patient. That is why even nursing mothers are advised to expose their body and massage their child and themselves in the sun. Now days, to lie in the sun and rest are called sun bathing.

Throughout the year, Surya enters various planets. When it enters certain planets, Hindus bathe and celebrate the occasion. Among the many festivals they observe are *Makkar Sankranti* and *Chatt*. If we give continuity to the worship of Surya like our ancestors by reciting the *Gayatri* Mantra and doing the Surya *Namaskar,* we will not only live a disciplined life, but also be free from disease. When the followers of Hinduism recite *Gayatri* Mantra, they are meditating on goddess *Gayatri* or on Surya himself. By reciting this Mantra a person becomes so powerful that they can move to a higher caste just like Sage *Vishwamitra* who belonged to the *Chotri* caste but gained *Brahmma* hood by reciting this Mantra.

The moral lesson of Surya is that just like he burns himself to give us heat, light and energy likewise we should also live for others by sacrificing our self interest. This is the lesson we can learn from Surya.

Beauty of rising before dawn:

According to Hinduism, a person is born as a human being after passing through more than eight million, four hundred thousand different births and deaths. That is why this journey of life of a human being should be traveled in a perfect manner to free them-self from this cycle. To gain this freedom a person must be a dedicated human being both mentally and physically. Manu, one of the philosophers of Hinduism has written that we must begin the day before sunrise and chant the following verse.



Brhammay Muharatay Budhayta Dharmaartha Chanuchintyata:

This means, a person should wake up before dawn and mediate on religious and enlightening subjects. Mother Nature has divided a day into twenty-four hours that is night and day. The day begins with the rising of the sun and ends with sunset. As the sun rises it awakes all living beings that thrive during the day to start their activities with new hopes and aspirations. As it rises further in the sky it gives new energy and strength. And as it begins to set it makes all living beings that thrived during daylight tired. As night begins, the living things of the day start to rest and the living things that thrive during the night start their activities. Hindus believe the moon showers nectar on the earth before dawn. That is why they say a person should wake up before dawn so that their body can absorb this nectar. This period of time in Sanskrit is known as *Brahmma muhrat*. It is anywhere from half an hour to forty-five minutes before the sun rises. During this period the environment is peaceful with no pollution and is filled with wonderful qualities. The old saying "Early to bed and early to rise makes a person healthy, wealthy and wise" is true. One who gets up before dawn never depends on anyone and is always successful in life.

A person should get up before dawn and remember his creator. While sitting on the bed they should not only thank their creator for a good night's sleep but also for showering his blessings on them. They should pray to the almighty to continue blessing them in the journey of life. A person who begins the new day in this manner will be gentle and have a contrite heart. They will be ready to meet the challenges that may come their way. Then he should look at the palms of both hands and recite the following verse.

Kragray Vaste Laxmi kramadhya Saraswati:
Kramulay tu Govinda prabhatay karadarsanam:

This means, Goddess *Laxmi* resides on the tips of our fingers, Goddess *Saraswati* in the palms of our hands and *Govinda* or *Brahmma* below the wrist of our hands. That is why a person waking at dawn should look at the palm of his hands and recite the above verse and worship them. The reason for worshipping the hands is goddess *Laxmi* represents wealth and prosperity without which we cannot move in this materialistic world. Likewise, Goddess *Saraswati* represents intelligence and knowledge without which we cannot move in the journey of life. Likewise, *Govinda* or *Brahmma* represents power and strength without which we cannot face the challenges of the world.

The reason for praying to the palms of our hands is to make us self sufficient and not dependent on others. We promise ourselves to be a good and successful person. We make our hands the witness to every deed we do. We can only gain salvation if we do good and righteous deeds and be honest. It is the actions of the hands that liberate us from the love of materialistic things of the world. Looking at the reflection of one's face on a stone fitted in a ring at dawn is very important for a Hindu. They believe seeing ones face, first thing in the morning before seeing someone else's is the beginning of a successful day.

The philosophical aspect of getting up at *Brahmma Muhrat* (before dawn) is to enjoy the fresh clean air and the wonderful atmosphere of the early morning which will make us healthy, wealthy, beautiful, wise, strong etc. It is a time when we promise ourselves that we will be an honest person. It is also a time to pray and show our gratitude to the creator. Likewise, when we look at the palms of our hands and worship goddess *Laxmi, Saraswati* and god *Govinda* or *Brahmma*, we are asking them to guide us in our activities. When we start getting wealthy we forget ourselves and become vane. We forget that wealth represents goddess *Laxmi* who is very lively and does not stay in one place. That is why, when a person becomes prosperous and wealthy his mind also becomes restless so to control him he needs *Saraswati*, which represents intelligence and knowledge. She controls the restless *Laxmi.* Likewise only wealth and knowledge are not enough to move ahead in the journey of life. One also needs strength, which is *Govinda* or *Brahmma* who resides below the wrist of our hands.

The practical and moral aspect of getting up at *Brahmma* Murat according to *Ayurveda* is that our hands are the maps of our body's internal organs. In the morning when we put our hands together and look at the palms of the hand the small finger of both the hands should be aligned. Likewise the three lines below tip of the fingers should also be aligned. If they are not aligned then we should know there is something wrong inside us. By maintaining the discipline of getting up before dawn we will not only have a healthy mind but also a healthy body.

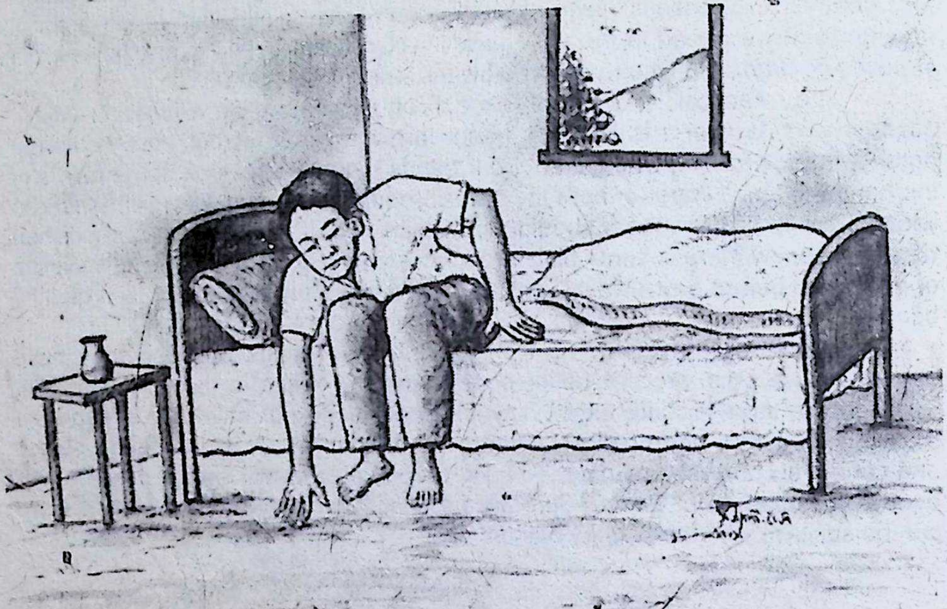
People as they grow up may fall into bad habits because they have associated with the wrong type of people and the result is they become idle. Such people then become either lazy, carefree or do not have the strength as they are filled with bad qualities. Their lives become meaningless and useless and cannot accomplish anything. To safeguard ourselves we should practice and accept the qualities of *Laxmi, Saraswati* and *Govinda* or *Brahmma* so that we can be successful in the journey of life.

Gratitude to Mother Earth:

When we get up at dawn we should first give thanks to our creator and then worship the palms of our hands. Before stepping on the ground from our bed we should recite the following *Laxmi* verse from the *Purands*

Samudrabasne devi:
Parwatistanmandle Vishnupatni:
Namastuvayyam padhisparsha chmaswa may:

This means: Oh wife of Lord Vishnu, the earthly daughter of the oceans. You have been decorated by the oceans. The beautiful Himalayan Mountains are your breasts. Salutations to you, forgive me for always stepping on you!



The above verse praises Goddess *Laxmi's* wonderful qualities in the form of Mother Earth. The oceans are filled with diamonds, pearls, emeralds and millions of other precious gems. Likewise, it has also praised the Himalayan Mountains and the snows that melt to give us not only water to drink but also water to irrigate our lands? As Hinduism originated in the Indian sub continent its Gurus composed the above verse describing the beauty of the sub continent. The purpose of the above verse was to instill in a person loyalty and love for the place they are born in. In today's language we could say its aim was to bring a sense of patriotism and loyalty in a citizen. When the verse was composed the whole world was a free place, where a person could roam and move without any restrictions and barriers? A person could live and settle wherever he liked.

In the morning before stepping on the ground from our bed we should remember our country and worship its soil because when we do this it will fill us with new energy and strength. When we worship our Mother Land from the core of our heart it gives us a wonderful feeling. We should feel happy and proud of the fact that we are the citizens of the most wonderful country of the world. We should think about the natural beauty, the man-made sites and the other wonderful features of our country and feel proud of the fact that we are its citizens. We should look at the beauty of our country just like we look at the beauty and the wonderful qualities of our mother. We should think and contemplate on the wonderful things that Mother Nature has bestowed upon our country.

Like the mountains, hills and the valleys filled with many beautiful dales, roaring rivers that gurgle and streams that wind leisurely throughout the country. They not only add to the beauty of the country but also provide us with drinking water and irrigate our lands. Thick jungles and forests filled with different varieties of birds and animals, beautiful valleys and hills filled with lakes, are also examples of Mother Nature's bountiful blessings to us. Wherever we look there is nothing but beauty. We should thank our creator who made us the citizen of such a beautiful country. We should think about the many hidden natural resources of the country and how to tap and use them to make our country and its people an independent, prosperous and proud citizen. We should also think about the many historical sites that our rulers and ancestors made for us to watch and enjoy. We should also think of the great people who crafted our nation and follow their examples and be inspired to make even greater things than they made. Our unique cultural heritage separates us from other cultures of the world. Our language and customs give us an identity, which we must preserve and promote. Only when we are proud citizen of our country then only our country and its citizens will prosper.

The philosophical aspect of Gratitude towards Mother Earth is by getting up in the morning and worshipping the soil of our country we thus show our love and respect to her. When we do this we are honest, sincere citizen of the country. Mother Earth provides us food, shelter, and so many other wonderful gifts but we spit and desecrate her. In spite of that she is kind, loving, patient and continues to provide us the necessities of life. We should put our right hand across our chest and vow to work to make our country and countrymen great. This kind of gratitude can only be expressed by human beings and not by any other living thing. This is the wonderful quality of being a human being. To be born thus and to be grateful to the people and things that help us in the journey of life is a human quality. We should never forget the fact that our Motherland is not only ours but also belongs to other living things that live in it. We should remember that we are alive because of the air we breathe and the water we drink, food that we eat and all the other things that are provided to us by Mother Earth. After death, we become part of the elements of Mother Earth. So we must understand that Motherland or (Mother Earth) is not a separate identity from us but we are a part of her. So it is our duty to be loyal and grateful to her. If we do not have the qualities of gratitude towards our Motherland and its soil we are characterless, useless and a curse to humanity.

Puja; Philosophy of daily Worship

When Hindus worship their gods and goddesses it is called *Puja*. The reason for doing *Puja* is to offer with respect and thanks objects representing the five elements to the gods and goddesses. Hindus from their childhood have seen their grandmother; mother and sisters doing *Puja* every morning and evening in their homes. They have also seen them offering rice, incense, wick lamps, food and other items to the gods and goddesses. Most of the people doing *Puja* do not understand it's meaning and are giving continuity to a tradition that has been handed down from generation to generation. As doing Puja is a daily routine in a Hindu's life its significance has to be understood.

Before Hindus do *Puja* to their Gods and Goddesses they must bathe and purify themselves. Then they bathe their gods and goddesses. After that they put a Tika on their forehead and ring a bell to attract the attention of the gods to enter the world of worship

Hindus believe, that the moment their mothers conceive them they are covered by the five elements which are earth, water, fire, air and ether. Our physique is earth, blood is water, heat in our body is fire, what we breathe is air, and the empty space inside our body is ether. Human beings cannot exist without these elements. Likewise Hindus believe their gods are also covered by these five elements. That is why when they do *Puja* they offer these five elements to them.

That is why a devotee before doing *Puja* first covers himself with the five elements. He first puts a *Tika* on his forehead made of rice and red vermilion powder mixed with water. Rice represents earth and red vermilion represents the fire element. Then he ties a piece of cloth or thread around his neck representing the air element. After that he places a flower on his head representing the ether element.

After he has covered himself with the five elements then he covers the gods with these elements. First, he offers food which represents the earth. Then he lights an oil lamp representing fire. Then, he offers incense which represents the air element. After that he offers a fruit which represents the ether element? Lastly, he offers the water element which completes the ritual.

After the devotee has covered himself and the gods with the five elements, he has equaled himself with the divine. Now it is easier for him to interact with the gods. He bows to the gods and goddesses and worships them.

The offerings of a devotee must be shared between the gods and the devotee. It is believed the offerings are filled with divine powers so the edible offerings must be eaten with the gods. Leftovers are taken home for the rest of the family members. After the devotee has finished his *Puja,* he rings a bell and offers an oil lamp to return to the material world.

In today's fast paced world, a devotee has little time to follow the traditional way of doing *Puja* as it is time consuming and is only done on special occasions. It is very important that a devotee must eat some of the offerings with the gods; otherwise something drastic can happen to him as quoted in the Hindu *Satya Narayan* story which reads like this:

Once while *Lilawati* and her daughter *Kalawati* were worshiping god *Satya Narayan,* they suddenly heard that their husbands who had gone to foreign lands were seen returning in a boat. As they heard the news both of them rushed to welcome their husbands. *Lilawati* saw her husband coming towards them in a boat but *Kalawati* could not see hers, and began to cry. Then *Lilawati* asked Kalawati if she had eaten some of the offerings that they had offered to god *Satya Narayan. Kalawati* said she had not as she was in a hurry to see her husband. Her mother told her to immediately run back to the place of worship and eat some of the offerings. After eating the offerings the daughter ran back to where her mother was. Lo and behold! she saw her husband and the boat. The message of the story is that after completing any worship a devotee should eat some of the offering with the gods for the opening of the inner eye. That is why when we worship we must be fully devoted.

Hindus perform two different types of *Puja.* One is a special *Puja* that a devotee has vowed to perform either in their home or in a temple. These *Puja* are *Satya Narayan*, Jaya *Santoshi* Ma *Sapta*, Rudri and so on. When a devotee organizes these special *Puja* they pay a priest to perform the traditional *Puja* which takes a long time. For the traditional *Puja* they invite their family members and friends to take part in the celebrations. The other type of *Puja* is the daily morning and evening *Puja* they do in their homes.

The daily *Puja* is usually performed by the senior female member of the house. She gets up early in the morning and goes to get fresh, clean water. After bathing and cleaning herself and washing the water vessel she washes the tap and gives thanks to it for providing water. Before entering the house she sprinkles some water on god *Ganesh* and Kumar who are on the two sides of the main door. She also sprinkles some water on the top of the doorway where god *Bhairab* resides. After that she heads for the *Puja* room and washes the *Puja* tray and lays all the offerings on it. Then she comes downstairs and stands outside the main door of the house facing the sun and worships it. Then she worship god *Ganesh* for success and god Kumar the protectors of the house. After that she does *Puja* to all the gods of the neighborhood she comes back home.

Before entering the house she worships the top of the doorway where goddess *Ghirha Laxmi* or god *Bhairab* is believed to reside. In the *Puja* room she worships all the gods and goddesses including the family god and the founding father of the family. After she has completed doing the Puja she bows and touches the feet of the eldest family member of the house and then follows according to seniority. By worshipping the elders of the house she is humbling herself before the elders. It is the duty of the elders to bless her with their right hand and compiement her with best wishes. When elders bless her in this manner they are transferring their experience, knowledge and positive energy to her. These were traditions and practices that kept a family united. The evening prayer is not as long as the morning one. The devotee looks up at the setting sun and scatters a few grains of rice and thanks the gods for their kindness. After that she lights an oil lamp or incense and concludes the worship. In this way the Hindus not only worship the five elements but also the sixth element, their ancestors. They accept all the six elements as their gods and family members.

The philosophical aspect of *Puja* is that Hindus treat their gods and goddesses like a family member. They bathe them, massage them with oil, clothe them and even dress them up as if they were family members. They even apply make up on them. Sometimes they even clap and dance in front of them. At night before going to bed they put their gods and goddesses to sleep by singing religious lullabies.

Now day's people wonder why so much fuss and care is being done to a lifeless stone. This is the unique characteristic of Hindu worship that is not understood by them. A dedicated Hindu devotee, through their devotional power, brings to life a lifeless idol. This is a fact that is experienced and felt only by a true devout Hindu

Our ancestors deprived themselves of so many things in order to hand them down to us so that we would not be in need of materials or lack anything. Just like they inherited and handed these traditions, customs and wealth to us, they wanted us to give continuity to our children for their prosperity. Because we have given continuality to these traditions and customs parents, children, husbands and wives live in peace and harmony even today and the result is a harmonious family relationship.

There are scholars who believe that we can experience and see God in three ways. The first is by worshipping their images. The second is by chanting verses to different objects and trying to bring them to life. The last is worshipping gods through thought and meditation with the belief that god can be experienced and seen because he\she is within us.

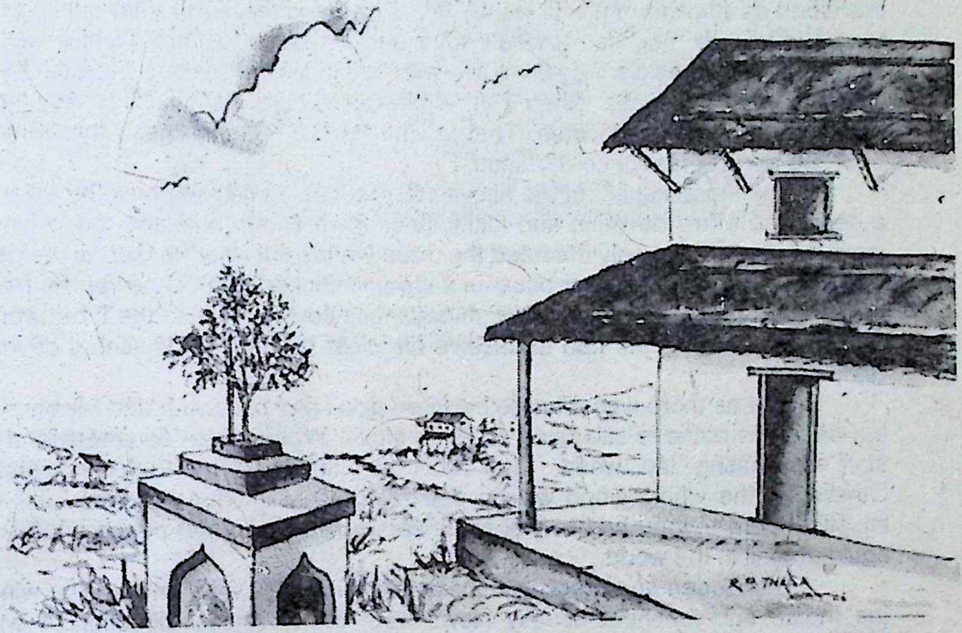
The practical and moral aspect of Puja is getting up early in the morning and taking a walk. The air at this time is free from pollution and full of energy that invigorates us. Walking to a temple represents physical exercise with a cool and active mind for a successful day. To have a family, friends and relatives is very important in Hindu society. because they believe in cooperation and sharing amongst themselves. They believe only then an ideal society will be possible. Respect and cooperation, where elders are looked up-to and the young ones loved will sustain the peace. Hindu ancestors started the culture of daily *Puja* for this purpose. The Hindus believe that God is power and has many different forms. There is so much power in nature that human beings depend on for their survival. Mother Nature not only provides for human beings but to all living beings. Hindus started worshipping nature in its powerful form of gods and goddesses to thank them. It is believed that if a society cannot maintain societal and spiritual decorum in the form of *Puja* rituals and family harmony there would be no peace either in the family, community, or the nation. When Hindus do puja they try to become one with the gods by respecting and giving them thanks. It is also done to thank Mother Nature, our ancestors, parents, and elders who have helped us in the journey of life. A devotee recites holy verses praising them and surrenders his body, mind and soul by bowing to them. Different gods and goddesses represent different forces of nature. All religions put their gods at a higher level than themselves and Hinduism is no different. The only difference is that in Hinduism devotees bring the gods to their level, to be more personal.

The best time to do *Puja* is early in the morning because a person is full of peace and harmony and can pray with a sincere and contrite heart. Our ancestors gave importance to this practice because they believed that by doing Puja, a person would maintain a healthy body, mind and soul. People nowadays go for morning walk as a form of exercise and to be healthy. Hindus knew the importance of getting up early in the morning thousands of years ago that is why they did the daily morning *Puja*.

Tulsi; Its hidden mysteries

Hindus once a year, on an auspicious day, plant *Tulsi* or the Basil plant in the southeast direction of their house on a raised ground. This plant is also known as *Tulsi Narayan*. In the *Padma Puran* there is an interesting story as to how the plant originated and reads like this.

In ancient times there was a very beautiful and intelligent princess named *Brinda*. She was a faithful devotee of Lord Vishnu and worshipped him day and night. She always chanted his name and sang hymns in praise of him. It was a custom in those days that kings got their daughters married off to princes, who were either brave or famous. So in accordance with the custom of the time princess *Brinda* was married to prince *Jalandhar.* Even after getting married she kept on singing and praising Lord Vishnu. She also encouraged others to do the same. Just as she was a faithful believer of Lord Vishnu, her husband was an atheist and did not like him. Because of their differences regarding this matter *Brinda* and her husband always quarreled and fought. *Jalandhar* would say to her, "Whatever I am today is because of my devotion, knowledge and strength and not because of some god's love and pity."



Brinda gave the same love and devotion to *Jalandhar* that she gave to Lord Vishnu. Because of her love, devotion, faithfulness, and chastity *Jalandhar* became more and more powerful. He became so strong and powerful that no one in the three worlds could defeat him. Because of his rule of terror, justice and righteousness started disappearing from the world. He created so much havoc and terror that Lord Shiva himself went to challenge him but was defeated by *Jalandhar*. After being defeated Lord Shiva went to Lord Vishnu and told him "Because of *Brinda's* love and devotion to you, and her faithfulness towards her husband I could not defeat him and stop him from terrorizing the three worlds. So you must do something otherwise justice and righteousness will disappear forever." After hearing Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu agreed to stop *Jalandhar's* reign of terror.

One day Lord Vishnu disguised himself as *Jalandhar* and went to *Brinda* to break her chastity. When she saw Lord Vishnu she thought he was her husband and started busying herself like a faithful wife fulfilling his desires. While she was serving him news came from the battlefront that her husband was killed.

She was so shocked at what she heard she could not bear the pain and lost her senses. When she regained, she suddenly realized that Lord Vishnu had deceived her. She got so angry with him that she started cursing him to turn into a stone, tree and shrub. In accordance with her curse, Lord Vishnu appears in this world as *Shaligram* (fossil stone) *Pepal* tree and the *Tulsi*. After cursing Lord Vishnu she took her life. *Brinda's* love and devotion to Lord Vishnu was so strong, that she was born again to live with him in the *Tulsi* plant, because that is where he likes to reside. When *Tulsi* is offered to Lord Vishnu, he is very happy and pleased with the devotee. That is why Hindus worship these three things, because they represent Lord Vishnu.

The moral aspect of the above story is that we can see how the extent of a dedicated wife's devotion and faithfulness towards her husband made him so powerful, that he not only defeated the three worlds but also the God of the gods; *Mahadeva*. When *Jalandhar* became vane and wicked with his power, he had to be destroyed, so that justice and righteousness could prevail in the three worlds. To do this, Lord Vishnu had to deceive his most faithful and dedicated devotee, *Brinda*.

Just as there was a tussle between good and bad, truth and falsehood in the past, this battle is still going on even today. When unrighteousness and evil start dominating the world, they must be destroyed by truth and justice. Otherwise, the whole world will be destroyed. That is why to destroy evil and injustice, Lord Vishnu had to plot to defeat *Jalandhar* so that peace and justice could prevail in the world.

The hidden and practical aspects of planting *Tulsi* are many. The wind in the Indian sub-continent usually blows from the southeast direction in which direction the *Tulsi* is grown. The fragrance coming from the *Tulsi* destroys all bacteria and harmful particles in the house and the surrounding area. This fragrance keeps the air and the atmosphere clean and free from germs and insects. Hindus believe, if a few drops of *Tulsi* water are put in the mouth of a dying person, their soul will go to Heaven. That is why before Hindus breathe their last they are carried around the *Tulsi* plant. After that they are laid on the ground that has been mopped with a mixture of cow dung and red soil. More than five hundred different *Ayurvedic* medicines are made from it.

Tulsi plays an important role in making Ayurvedic medicines. If its leaves are eaten or water dipped in it is drunk, patients free himself from many diseases. If we wear a garland made from its wood it will protect us from all kinds of diseases and evil spirits. If we gain knowledge about its medicinal values we can cure ourselves from many diseases and also cure others.

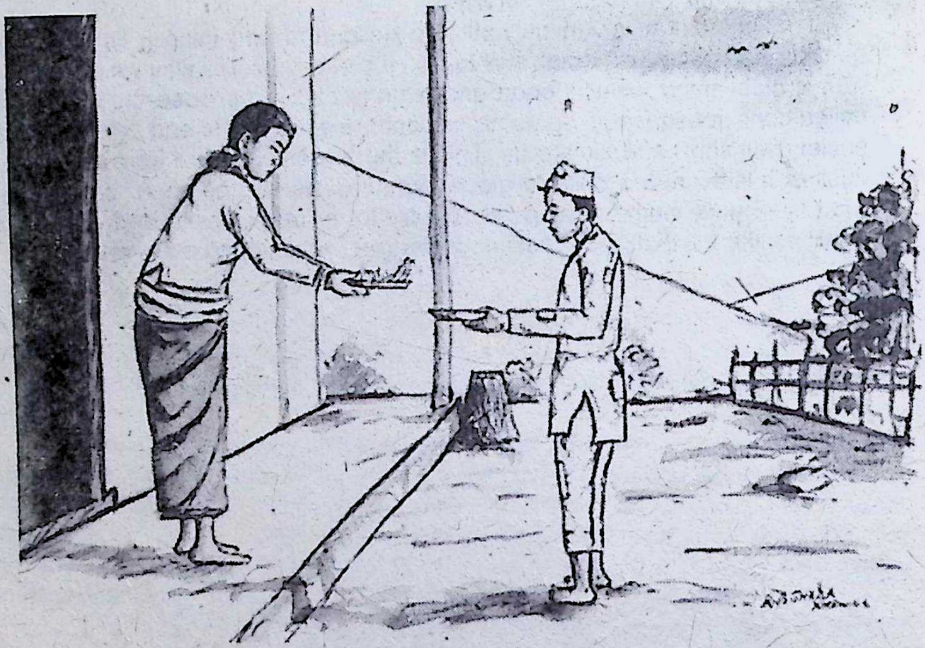
The ancient seers and philosophers of Hinduism knew the importance of many trees and plants that benefited mankind. That is why they gave them religious importance so that they would be respected. The *Pepal* tree is worshipped as Lord Vishnu. Today science has discovered that its leaves never shrivel up and converts carbon dioxide into oxygen throughout the day and night while other plants do it only at night. That is why philosophers of Hinduism taught us to love and respect nature because it provides us with many good things of life without which we cannot survive.

Nature has given us both the good and bad things. To make our life better it has given us nectar and to ruin it poison. That is why we should choose with a clear mind what is good and what is bad. To choose the correct path is called consciousness. If we do not accept the good things and fall into bad habits society will shun and isolate us. This is the lesson we learn from the *Tulsi* plant. Just as it is accepted in its religious form, it is also accepted in its material form. That is why we human beings should try to make our lives filled with wonderful qualities like the *Tulsi, which* is respected and worshipped every day.

How to begin a successful day:

Hindus begin their day by praying to their hands, Mother Earth, gods, goddesses and elders. When they come out of the house, they bow to god *Ganesh* and Kumar placed on the two sides of the doorway, asking them to give knowledge and strength to meet the challenges of the new day.

All of us before starting a new day plan and think of all the various activities we have to do, who we have to meet and so on. We begin the day, hoping that all our activities will be successful. That is why we worship god *Ganesh* on the right side of the door to ask him for knowledge and remove all the obstacles that may come our way. We ask him to give us intelligence and wisdom to make our day smooth and successful. God *Ganesh's* two wives are *Riddhi* and *Siddhi,* who represent wealth and knowledge. His two sons are *Subh* and *Labh*, meaning auspiciousness and profit. His daughters name is *Santoshi,* meaning contentment. So we can say god *Ganesh* has a family just like his believers who identify with him.



There are many stories as to the origin of *Ganesh*. One version is that the demons did a lot of difficult penance to please and honor Lord Shiva so that they could get boons. He was so pleased by their devotion that he granted them their wishes. After getting the boon, the demons started attacking *Indra*, the king of the gods and his followers. After defeating the gods, they started mistreating them. When the mistreatment became unbearable, *Indra* went to Lord Shiva and pleaded with him to save them. He asked Lord Shiva to create a barrier that would stop the penance of the demons reaching the gods. Seeing the pitiful condition of *Indra* and the gods led Lord *Shiva* to create *Bhignayshwor*, the god of barriers. After *Bhignayshwor* was created, he stopped all the prayers and penance of the demons reaching the gods.

Another version is that one day before Goddess *Parwati* took her bath she was massaging her body with a mixture of turmeric powder and oil. As she was massaging herself she collected a lump of scurf in her hands from her body. As she kept on massaging and playing with the lump she molded a figure of a beautiful child. She was so pleased with her creation that she breathed life into it and made it a living being. Then she bestowed all her godly powers and energies into the child and ordered him to guard the entrance of the house while she bathed.

While the child was on guard, Lord Shiva, husband of Goddess *Parwati*, came and tried to enter the house. But the child would not let him in. Shiva got angry with the child and both of them got into a heated argument and eventually a fierce fight broke out between them. In the fight Shiva cut off the child's head. When *Parwatii* saw the headless child she got very angry with Lord Shiva and told him to immediately restore her child back to life. Shiva ordered his men to go north and kill the first living thing they met and bring its head back and attach it to the child's body. Shiva's followers found a baby elephant and killed it. They brought its head and attached it to the child's body

Amongst the many stories of Lord *Ganesh* the following is the most accepted and interesting. Goddess *Parwati* gave birth to such a beautiful boy that all the gods came to see him. *Parwati* noticed all of them admiring her son but not *Sani* because he was in a dilemma as to what he should do. if he looked at the child he would be destroyed and If he did not look then *Parwati* would get angry with him. So in fear he looked at the child. As soon as his gaze fell on the child's head disappeared. Seeing the headless child *Parwati* started to weep. Lord Vishnu in order to console her told one of his followers to search for any living being that was sleeping with its head facing the north. And when they found one, they should cut off its head and join it to the child's body. The follower came across a baby elephant sleeping in like manner. So he cut off the head and joined it to the child's body. The head was so cute and attractive that everyone praised and accepted it as *Parwati's* child. That is why Hindus believe, if the evil eye of *Sani* falls on anyone, they will have to face many problems.

Ganesh a very popular god amongst the Hindus and is also known as *Gajananda, Ekdante, Ganapati*, etc. When Hindus pray to him they ask for wisdom and to remove any obstacle that may have to face. Before beginning any *puja* or ritual, they must pray to him because he is the lord of the gods. Before he became Ganapati the lord of the gods all the gods used to quarrel as to who was the greatest amongst them. One day all the gods decided to hold a competition to circle the universe and whoever came first would be declared the greatest among them. All the gods took part in the competition with their swift vehicles but poor *Ganesh* only had a slow shrew. He looked at the gods racing away and wondered what to do, because his shrew had no chance against the swift carriers of the gods. He was in a dilemma and was wondering what to do and was heading towards his parents Shiva and *Parwati.* As he saw them an idea struck him so he requested his parents to sit down. Then he circled them several times and worshipped them. He told them, "The whole universe depends on you for its survival and existence. So you, my parents, are far greater than the universe." Shiva and *Parwati* were very pleased with him and from that day onwards he was called *Ganapati,* lord of the gods. Since then, before performing any ceremony, he has to be worshipped first.

Likewise, the reason for worshipping god Kumar or *Kartike*, who is on the left side of the main door of the house is to ask for strength and courage to face the challenges of the new day because only knowledge is not sufficient to achieve success. Courage and strength is also needed. That is why Kartike or Kumar is worshipped. There is a interesting story as how *Kartike* became the commander of the gods which reads as follows.

A demon named *Tarkasur* did severe penance to please Lord *Brahmma* so that he could get a boon to defeat all the gods. Lord *Brahmma* was so pleased with him that he granted him the boon. After getting the boon he started fighting with the gods. After defeating them he reigned terror and started mistreating them so much that it was unbearable. All the gods decided to go to *Brahmma* and beg him to rescue them from their misery. After hearing the gods *Brahmma* told them he could not help them but a seven-day-old son of Lord Shiva could rescue them.

So the gods went to Mt. *Kailash* the abode of Shiva to beg for help. When they reached *Kailash* they found Shiva and *Parwati* engrossed in love making and were afraid to disturb them. However *Parwati* became aware of the presence of the gods and was angry with them. She cursed the gods for disturbing her and Shiva saying, "They would never have any children." When the gods had seen *Shiva* and *Parwati's* sexual activity, Shiva was on the verge of discharging his semen so he asked them what to do with the semen. The gods told him to throw it on the earth. The earth could not bear its extreme heat so it gave it to fire. The fire could not bear its heat so it gave it to River *Ganga*. River *Ganga* also could not bear its extreme heat, so she gave it to the reeds and brushes growing on her banks. As the reeds and brushes took the semen, a baby boy was born from it and began to cry. Six *Kritika* women, who were bathing nearby heard the cries of the baby. They came and took turns feeding and looking after the child. That is why the child is called *Kartike* because six *Kritika* women raised him.

When the gods heard that Lord Shiva's son was born, they immediately went to fetch him. They placed him in their midst and were going to proclaim him their commander in chief. As *Indra,* the king of the gods, was about to sprinkle holy water to purify the occasion his hands suddenly became numb. At that very moment, Shiva told *Indra*, "Your hands have become numb, because before honoring *Kartike*, you did not pray to *Ganesh*. After hearing *Shiva's* reprimand, *Indra* prayed to *Ganesh* and then was able to sprinkle water on *Kartike* to declare him their commander in chief. As soon as *Kartike* became the commander chief of the gods, he attacked *Tarkasur* and killed him. After the defeat of *Tarkasur*, the gods returned back to their places to live in peace and harmony.

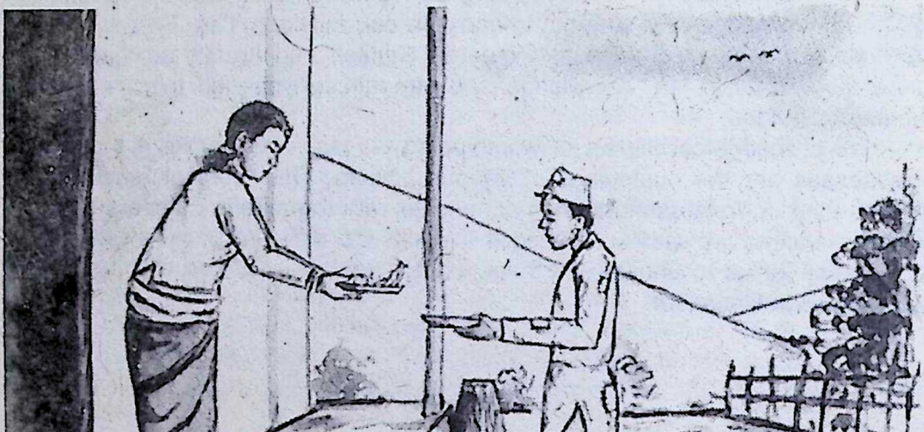
Hindus believe gods are present in the various forces that are present in nature or within us. These powers or skills can be in the form of knowledge, strength, art, business and so on.

The practical aspect of worshipping *Ganesh* and *Kartike* are we human beings need knowledge and strength to carry on our daily activities. That is why our learned and respected ancestors created *Ganesh* and *Kartike* so that we could be successful in life. Knowledge and strength are needed to face and overcome challenges.

The philosophical aspect of worshipping *Ganesh* and *Kartike* are gods and goddesses are the custodians of various powers. The seers of Hinduism weaved all kinds of interesting stories connected with the different powers both found in us and nature and connected them with the different gods, so that it would be easy for us to understand them. That is why there are so many gods and goddesses in Hinduism.

The Beauty of fasting

When a person intentionally does not eat food for a day or more, it is called fasting. People usually fast to stay fit and healthy. They also fast in honor of some god or goddess. It is believed if a devotee fasts sincerely in honor of a god or goddess it will compel them to be present before the devotee. In the Hindu scriptures we can read many stories of how devotees compelled the gods and goddesses to present themselves before them while they were fasting. Among the many stories, goddess *Parwati's* is the most interesting one, because it drew Mahadeva, the god of gods, to appear before her. That is why once a year, not only Hindu women, but also many men fast in honor of *Parwati's* victory. According to Hinduism, taking a fast needs a lot of determination and devotion. When a person fasts they should not eat a single grain of food or a drop of water. In the holy Hindu scriptures *Shukla Yajurved Richa* 19/10 it is written



Vratena dichyamapnoti dichyamapnoti dachinaml:
Dachinam shradhamapnoti shradhyaya satyamapyate:

This means, a person who fasts, becomes perfect? A perfect person gets the reward they seek. By controlling the mind they gain respect and through respect they gain true knowledge.

There is no hard and fast rule as to how a person should fast. A person can fast according to the availability of time and convenience. Some people fast on Tuesdays to honor god Hanuman, while others fast on Thursdays in honor of *Saraswati*. Some fast on the first day of the new moon, while others on full moon.

It is said that in the past, as soon as the winter season was over, people used to fast for seven days without taking a grain of food. This fast was done to lose weight gained during the winter season, as people ate more food in this season than in summer. Likewise, people also fasted for seven days after the rainy season to flush out any sand or stones that they may have eaten with vegetables.

Some people fast for twelve hours, while others fast for seventy-two hours. After a fast, a person should not eat solid food immediately. They should break the fast by drinking lukewarm water or juice. According to *Ayurveda*, the world is formed of five elements; that are earth, water, fire, air and ether. These five elements enter our bodies in the form of *Jiva* or life. These *Jivas* are called the three humors known as *kapha, bata*, and *pitta*. *Kapha* humor consists of water and earth, *bata* consist of air and space and *pitta* consists of fire and water For a person to stay healthy, these three humors must be balanced in our body. People, suffering from diabetes, kidney problems heart and any other serious health problem, should not fast. When people do not eat food, their body gets more air than is needed, which is detrimental to good health. According to the principals of yoga, it is very good to fast once a week to stay fit and healthy.

The philosophical aspect of fasting is to stay fit and healthy. We can see and experience the beauty of fasting, by just recalling how sometimes, when we have eaten too much we feel lethargic and want to go to sleep. Nowadays, all kinds of foods are advertised day and night about their wonderful qualities to attract the consumers and the result is people are eating them all the time. And the result is every second person is getting fat, which eventually leads to all kinds of health problems. Another reason, why people are becoming fat is the easy availability of transportation to travel anywhere without difficulty. In the past, our ancestors, right from the time they got up, were busy working hard to fetch water, working in the fields or looking after the animals. They had to walk everywhere, sometimes even carrying loads. Their hectic day began with the rising sun and ended when it set. Because of the different activities they did they were exercising all the time and were fit.

It is said our ancestors gave away the food that they would have eaten to the poor when they fasted. When people fast they should pray and ask their inner soul why they are in the world. Why are they involved in so many activities and where are they going after they die. It is believed, if we sincerely ask these questions while fasting, we will eventually get the answers to our questions. When we fast once a week we will give our body and our digestive system rest and the result is we become fit and healthy. The most important benefit is serving the poor people by giving them the food we would have eaten.

If every human being in the world fasted, and gave what they saved from the fast to the less fortunate, what a wonderful world it would be. Just the feeling of sharing what we had with another, would elevate our minds and make us feel wonderful. If we fast regularly, there is less chance of us getting fat, diseased and lazy. Fasting from time to time does not spoil our body, but makes it physically, mentally and spiritually fit.

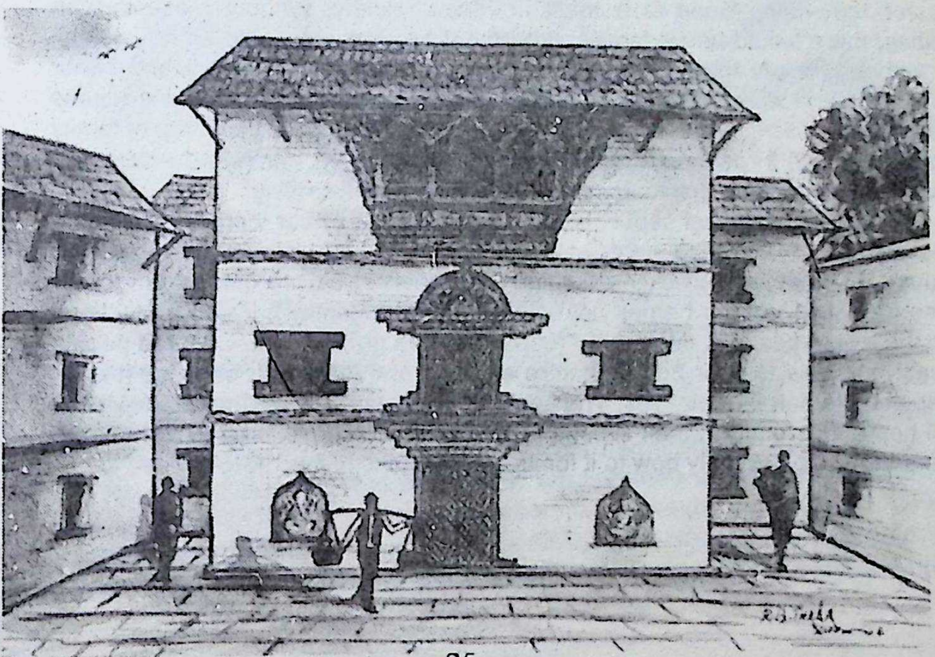
Among all living beings, humans are the most intelligent, strong and successful. If they do good and kind deeds this world would be Heaven but if they do terrible deeds then they would make it hell. That is why a person's mind should always be pure and clean, so that they can do good and kind deeds. It is written in the *Gita*.

Man aybam manushayanam Karand Bandhamochyo:

This means, it is the mind that troubles the mind and it is the mind that gives salvation. So if a person's mind is pure and clear, they are perfect and get salvation. They have no anger, greed, lust etc and stay away from the evils of the world and make it a Heaven. The real reason to fast should be to keep the mind under control. While fasting, we should remove all evils from our minds and try to develop good and kind thoughts. It is to reach this stage of tranquility that people fast.

Home is a place of Refuge:

All living beings in the world want a shelter where they can live. A home is a person's identity. All day long people leave their homes to do all kinds of work. As the day begins to end, people head for their homes. The home maybe built of mud, cement, brick or wood. It may have a flat or a slanting roof and can be of any color. When a person describes the notable features of their house, they give its location, style and color so that anyone can find it. Weather our house is simple or palatial it does not matter. It is our identity and place of refuge. It protects us from our enemies the rains, winters cold and the summer's heat. As a house played a very important role in a Hindus life in the past it was a custom to make the main entrance low, so that a person entered it with humility and respect. Above the main entrance of the house there was a figure of god *Bhairab,* the protector of the house, and on the two sides of the door there were the figures of god *Kumar* and *Ganesh*. A pair of big eyes were carved or painted on the main door of the house and above it a small eye was also placed. These three eyes represented the eyes of god *Bhairab.* Another reason for making the main entrance low was to make a person bow to these gods. It was also a custom to place figures of Nags (benign snakes) around the doors and windows of the houses. They were also placed on the walls between the ground and first floor of the house to protect the inhabitants and the house from enemies and aerial attacks.



Hindus believe Nags live under the ground so before constructing a house or temple it was important to know where they lived in that plot of land. Once the place was identified a small hole was made for the Nag so that he could come and go out of his house without any problem. People believed, if a house was made above the abode of Nags, it would crack and tumble down from the movement of the Nag coming in and going out of his house. Once the house was completed, the hole became the main drain of the house. The Nags coming in and out of its house not only kept the drain clean, but also kept the inhabitants of the house healthy because no filth accumulated in the drain. That is why the inhabitants of the house once in a while put different kinds of foods the Nags liked to eat at the mouth of the drain.

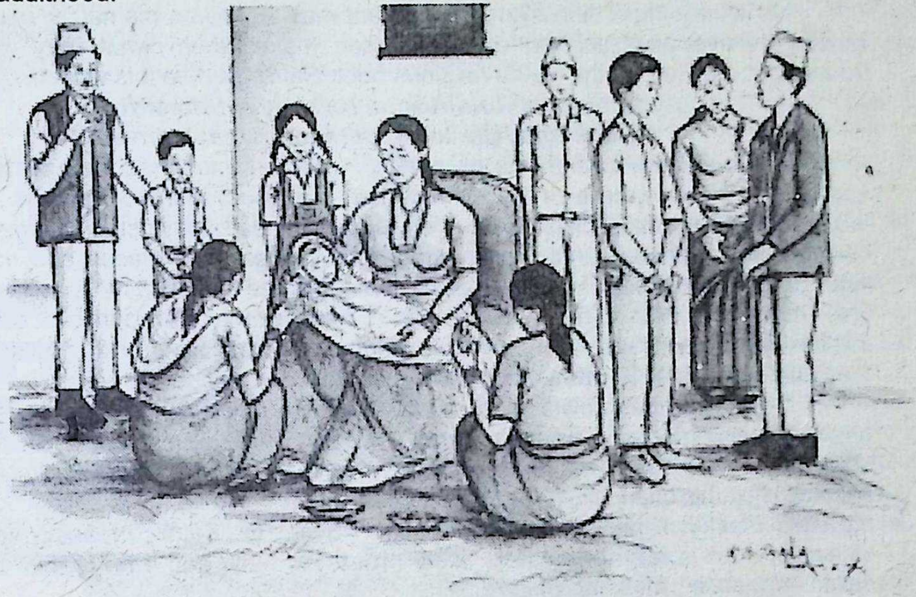
Hindus see everything in nature as gods and goddess because they believe everything in it has been created for their welfare. It is their duty love, respect and be grateful to nature for everything. They see the tops of the mountains, trees, flowers, rivers, birds, animals, insects etc as gods and goddesses. That is the reason why Hinduism has more than three hundred and thirty three million gods and goddesses.

Just like a house plays an indispensable role in a Hindus life, likewise, family life is also very important. As far as possible, they stay in joint families, because it unites them. To love and respect parents and worship them as gods is a part of their life. It is the responsibility of parents, to love and raise their children in a perfect manner. It is the duty of children to respect and be grateful to their parents for their love and sacrifices in raising them. To respect the elders and care for the young ones is a must in Hindu society. Without these human qualities, there would be no family and without family there would be no society, and without society there is no nation. That is why Hindus respect and honor their homes and worship it every time they leave or enter it. They call their homes *Greha Laxmi* which means "House of peace and Prosperity."It is the aim of family members, to live in peace and harmony by respecting the home and elders and loving the young ones, that keeps the Hindu society progressing.

The philosophical aspect of our home is that it is our identity. Our home gives us shelter from the heat, cold and wet. It is our refuge and protector, because if something terrible was going to happen to us, we quickly run to our house for safety. As our homes not only give us our identity but also protects us from the evil forces, it is our duty to respect and be grateful to it. Cultured people respect and bow to their homes before entering and leaving it, because it is an indispensable part of their lives. The seers of Hinduism saw the importance of an ideal home and family in their lives, that is why they made its main entrance low, so that they could humbly bow to it for its contributions in their lives.

Namakaran; Giving a child its identity

When a person is born in a Hindu family, they have to undergo many rites of passage throughout their life which have been handed down from generation to generation. The way they are performed varies from tribe to tribe and caste to caste. The aim of the rituals is to make a person a perfect human being. Hindus believe a newborn child is like a lump of clay and only when rituals are performed on them, they slowly become perfect. We can say these rituals are just like a potter taking a lump of clay and gradually molding it into a perfect product. The turning of the potter's wheel can be compared to the life span of a baby to adulthood.



The naming ceremony of a newborn child is the first ritual performed on the eleventh day of its birth. It is a custom after a child is born to inform the family astrologer about its birth. The astrologer makes the child's horoscope after consulting an astrological calendar. A couple of days before the child's naming ceremony, a family member goes to the astrologer, to find out the auspicious day, moment and the first letter the child's name should begin with. After his advice, all family members and friends are informed and invited to come for the ceremony. After all the family members and friends have come, a religious ceremony is held, filled with much festivity. The honor of first whispering the child's name into its ear is given to the eldest member of the family. In the case of a boy, it is whispered in his right ear and for a girl in the left. If the name begins with the letter "G", one of the elders may whisper the name "*Ganesh*", while another may whispers "*Govinda*". Likewise, if the first letter is "T", someone may whisper "Tara", while another may whisper "*Tika*", while someone else may whisper some other name. While the various names are being whispered in the baby's ears, everyone is keenly watching the baby's reaction to the various names. Sometimes, while the elders are whispering names in the child's ear, family members and friends assembled there, shout out various names. After everyone has taken their turn to whisper a name in the child's ear, all those present have to agree on a name beginning with the first letter determined by the astrologer.

It is very important, everyone present must agree on the name, because Hindus believe, that the name of a person makes them what they will be throughout their life. In the Hindu religious book *Smriti grantha* it is written,

Ayorchoha bhibridhescha sidhirvyawhritestttha:
Namakarmafalm twattt samudhristam maneseve:

This means the benefits of naming a baby are long-life, popularity and success in every sphere of life. Throughout the ages, learned scholars have followed these traditions. As Hindus are religious minded, they usually name their children after various Hindu gods, goddesses, sages' holy places and saints. After the religious ceremony, the eldest member of the family has the privilege of first feeding the baby. The meal consists of honey mixed with purified butter. If the family members feel, that only this mixture is not sufficient for the child, then they add some corn or wheat flour to the mixture for extra nourishment.

As the child grows up, it is but natural, that they change not only physically and mentally but their complexion and voice also change. As these changes take place in a growing child, they are given various nicknames, according to the changes. If the child's complexion is black, he is called "*Kale*", meaning Blacky. If he is white he is called "*Sete*", or "*Kuire*", meaning White. Likewise, if he is fat, he is called "Mote", meaning fatty, and if he is thin, he is called "*Chyanse",* meaning Skinny.

In the past, the naming ceremony was very important in a person's life. He or she was known and called by that name throughout their lives. But these days, people think, that a person shouldn't be called by their christened name. This is one of the evils that have entered into Hinduism. Seers and sages, who meditated for long periods, had established these rules and regulation for naming a child. They went through extreme conditions, like living in isolation, ignoring seasonal changes and all other natural hazards, to base their philosophy. Can we today question their selfless teachings and findings? Such doubts must be analyzed and questioned seriously.

The philosophical aspect of the naming ceremony is to activate the child's five sensory organs. The propounders of Hinduism saw the utility of the five active organs of a child functioning right from its birth, like hands and feet to move, the power to urinate, the power to excrete, and the power to cry. Similarly, they also wanted the child to know the five sense organs like the eyes to see, ears to hear, nose to smell, hands to feel and the power to taste. They knew the ear was the gateway to the brain, so they started the ritual of whispering the child's name into its ears to activate the brain. When a name was continually whispered in a child's ear, it would slowly realize that it was his\her name. In the past, a child's name was connected with the parent's name. If the father's name was "Ram", the sons name could be *Rameshwor* and the daughters could be *Rameshwori.* It was not necessary, that the name only followed the fathers, but could follow the mothers. If the mothers name was *Shova*, the daughters name could be *Shova Laxmi*. The main aim of the naming ceremony was to give the child an identity of his\her own, and also to be identified with the parents. Another important aspect of the ceremony was to slowly ensure the child's food intake particularly, if the mother's milk was insufficient.

For a person to be known in society they must have a name so that they can be identified from other people. For Hindus to give a name to a child is a very serious matter, not only for the parents, but for the whole family. They believe, it is the name of a person that guides their destiny.

These days, the custom of going to an astrologer, making a horoscope and seeking advice is thought old fashioned. In the name of progress and modernization they are forgetting their rich cultural heritage and aping others in taste and fashion. To inherit the ancestral name of the family was a birth right. But these days, due to the cultural rape, they are forgetting their rich cultural past and giving their children all kinds of names, never heard before. And the result is, parents plan something for their children and the children plan something else. The outcome is; many homes are broken, tears shed and much bitterness is experienced. In today's world, misunderstandings and quarrels between parents and children is very common, because the children are too exposed to the outside world at the cost of the parent's guidance. There is a Sanskrit verse, which says ***Yatha name tatha gunah:***

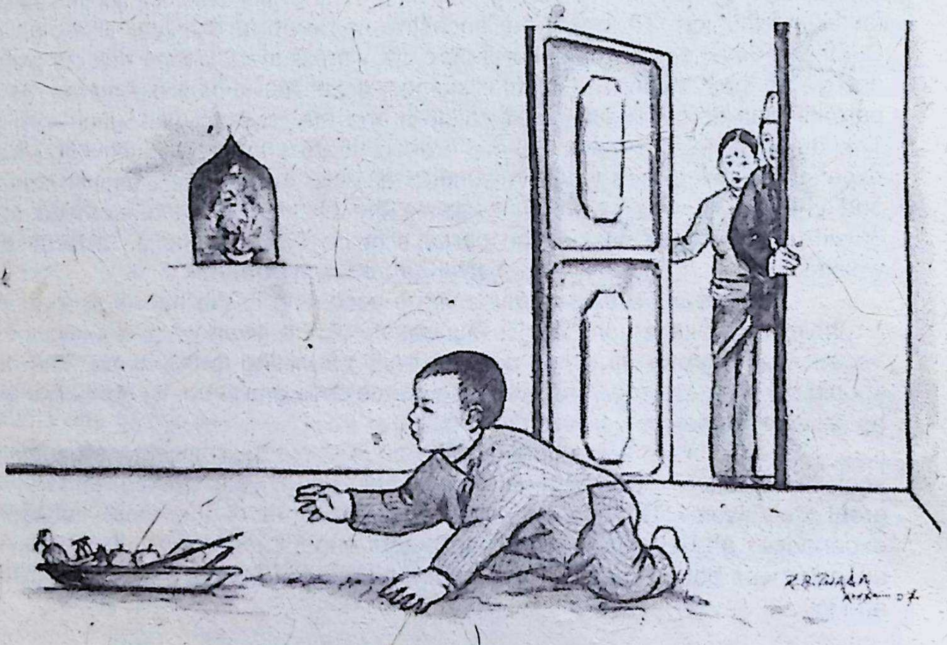
This means a person gains virtue according to the name given to them on their naming ceremony. Much thought should be given when naming a child, because as it grows up, it will develop traits pertaining to the name. The name should have a good meaning, because as the child grows up, it should like it and be proud of it and live up to its meaning.

In the past, people boasted with pride about their ancestor's names and achievements and honored them. They would proudly talk of them and say how great they were. They would even mention some of the most outstanding experiences and events that their ancestors had shared with them. In the past, ancestry was both, a passion and pride and memories were filled with nostalgia and joy.

Annaprasan; First feeding ceremony

Hindus must observe many rituals and sacraments throughout their lives even if they do not want to because family members, friends and the society compel them as these are its very foundation. These rituals and sacraments represent the cultural heritage that binds them together. Like the daughter of a family maybe married and living with her husband but she must go to her parents home, when sacraments and rituals are observed. Some require her presence, because without her, the ceremony cannot begin.

Likewise, the brother of a married sister is compelled to go to his sister's house, when various festivities and sacraments take place. Hindus lay emphasis on the fact, that the most important person after the mother to a child is the maternal uncle. That is why the maternal uncle of a child must be present for many of the sacraments and rituals of a nephew. Without his presence, many ceremonies cannot begin. There is a saying in Hinduism, if a child is in desperate need, they must first go to their mother for help, and if she cannot help, then they must go to their maternal uncle. In this way, brothers and sisters ensure a mutual relationship with each other for the sake of their children. Even after their parents have passed away, brothers and sisters are bound to visit each other time and again.



Among the many sacraments, the first solid food feeding ceremony of a child is very important. As the Hindu society consists of many ethnic groups, tribes and religious beliefs, the celebrations of these sacraments and ceremonies may differ but their aim is the same.

The first solid food feeding ceremony of a baby girl is performed on the fifth month and that of boy on the sixth month. Up till this time the baby generally survives on the mother's milk. It is but natural, that parents of a child are so excited with its birth, that they may forget to see that only the mother's milk is not sufficient. To oversee these mistakes, Hindu seers started the first rice feeding ceremony of a child. The fifth and the sixth month was most appropriate time because the baby's teeth have just begun to grow. The growing of the first set of teeth is an indication by Mother Nature, that the parents must realize, that the mother's milk alone is not sufficient and the baby needs solid food. Hindus do not feed solid food to a child without performing the feeding ceremony. Before it is performed, religious prayers are offered. The food fed to the child is in the form of grain, liquid or other solid matter, representing different gods and goddesses. It is a practice, that the child should be fed eighty-four varieties of food. If that is not possible, then at least twelve!

There are many verses in the Hindu scriptures regarding the importance of the first solid food feeding ceremony. One of them is the following

Anam Brahama raso Vishnurvricho Devo Maheshwara:
Jewanti rashpustani prandinamnnprasat:

This means that *Brahama* is grain. Vishnu is liquid. Likewise, Shiva is the plant that all grains grow on. That is why when living beings eat grains, liquid and plants; the body gets nourishment that gives them strength and long life.

Before the feeding ceremony, the horoscope of the child is taken to an astrologer to find out the auspicious day and moment. After the astrologer has given his advice, all family members and friends are invited for the occasion. After the family priest finishes the ceremony, the parents take the child to a *Ganesh* temple, if that is not possible; they worship *Ganesh* in their homes. After the priest has invoked the different gods and goddesses in the food, the eldest member of the family feeds a tiny bit of rice pudding to the child. After that, other family members and friends follow suit. Sometimes there are so many people feeding the child, that even though the food is a tiny amount it becomes a lot and the child starts crying and shakes its head in anger as if to say enough. Sometimes, a child is purposely starved, until it starts crying of hunger. The guardians then place different kinds of food in front of it and watch which food it eats first. Hindus believe, a person's future can be predicted by seeing which food the child eats first.

Rich families feed the child with gold spoons, coins or rings. Those, who cannot afford this, use silver, brass or other metals. Some people feed the baby with the beak of a Mynah bird in the hope, that the baby will soon start talking fluently, as this bird is very clever and can copy all kinds of sound. When the people feed the baby, they bestow different blessings. Some bless the baby saying start talking soon, others start walking soon, while others wish for long life, be wise, clever and intelligent etc. During the ceremony, a silver anklet and bracelet is put on the child. Sometimes, a garland, consisting of different animal teeth, coins, and bright stones are put around the baby's neck to protect it from all kinds of danger and evil spirits.

Before the ceremony is completed, the child is taken to a room and kept there alone. Different items like toys, pen, paper and other things babies like, are placed in front of the baby. Guardians and parents watch, which item the child picks up first. If it picks up toys then it is believed it will be a happy go lucky person. If it picks up a pen or copy, it will be a scholar.

There are many practical reasons, why Hindus are observing these rituals and sacraments, which they have been following from generation to generation as they are a part and parcel of their lives. No scientific research or attention has been given to these practices. Every ritual or sacrament is aimed to make a person physically and mentally perfect. These days the proof of their utility can be read and seen on all kinds of advertisements saying, "The baby is four months old and only the mother's milk is not sufficient, it needs solid foods." What the Hindu seers knew thousands of years ago, science is just realizing it.

The philosophical aspect of the first solid food feeding ceremony is that a child cannot tell its mother, your milk is not enough for my nourishment, I need more food. That is why when a child is five or six months old, Hindus celebrate the child's first solid food feeding ceremony. Parents can oversee this fact because they have been so busy hugging and cuddling it. In the beginning, the child is fed food that is easy to digest as its digestive organs are slowly developing. Gradually it is fed a mixture of different types of cooked beans, meat, green leaves etc. In this manner a baby is slowly fed different kinds of solid foods for a balanced diet. The first solid food feeding ceremony was started by the learned scholars of Hinduism, because they knew when the child was five or six months old, it had already grown its first set of teeth. To avoid the nursing mother's nipple being bitten by the child was also a good reason to celebrate this ceremony. Before this ceremony, no fruits, grain, or solid food has been fed to it, because the God of fire has not been present to witness the sacrament.

Chundakarma; First Hair Cut

All married couples want to have children. In the beginning, it does not matter whether it is a girl or a boy they just want a child. Some couples are blessed with many children, while others have none. Those, who do not have spend fortunes in the hope of getting a child. They visit doctors, shamans, temples even take perilous pilgrimages. They believe in any one who assures them that they will have a child.

Once a Hindu couple has a child, they have to observe many rituals and ceremonies on the child. These have to be performed on a child and continue till they grow up. Before performing any ritual or ceremony, the child's horoscope is taken to an astrologer to find out the auspicious day and moment for the ceremony. After his advice all the family members and friends are invited for the ceremony.

In Hindu society till a boy does not lose his milk teeth, he is considered to be god but once he loses them he is is a mortal and has to have his first hair cut which is called *Chunda Karma.* It is performed on him when he is one, three, five, or seven years old. Except for a tuft of hair growing on the crown of his head, all the rest has to be shaved. The first hair cutting ceremony is very important in Hindu society. In the Hindu scriptures it is written.

Taena Tae Aayushe Vachmie:
Sushlokaya Cha Swasthye:

This means, after a boy has shaved his hair for the first hair, he is no longer a god but a member of the family.

The following verse in the Hindu scripture "*Rudraddhaya*", chapter 18, verse 6 states, why this ritual has to be performed.

Niwartayamyayushe Annaddhaya Prajanaya:
Rayasphoshaya Suprajastwaya Suviryaya:

This means once a boys hair has been shaved the first time, he is ready to live a long life,, get grain and other food items, accumulate wealth, and make worthy children. He will also perform his duties valiantly. It also means after the first shave, he will be competent enough to face all responsibilities despite difficulties.

The boy's maternal uncle must come for this ceremony. He must bring a gold, silver or iron razor to shave the hair of his nephew. He shaves all the hair except for the tuft growing on the central part of the head. The aunt must collect the shaved hair on a tray without letting a single strand fall on the ground. Then she takes the tray of hair and lets it flow in a stream or buries it under a heap of cow dung, so that the child will not have to face any difficulties. After the ceremony is finished, the maternal uncle tells his nephew, now you have become a member of the family and must follow its rules and regulations and abide by the laws of society. After this ceremony has been performed, the boy is sent to a primary school to begin his education.

Man, in his journey of life, has progressed and changed with the demand of the times. As he progressed, he learned and experienced many things, which he practiced and handed down to his children. In the hoary past, men probably didn't cut or shave their hair, the result was that their head was always dirty and full of lice and other parasites. The consequence was that his head itched and smelt. One day, probably while he was scratching his head, he thought, why not shave of all the hair on my head. After shaving his hair, he felt so relieved, that he did not want his children to face the same problem. So this is probably how it gave way for the first hair shaving ceremony.

If Hindu traditions and values are studied in depth there are more philosophical aspects than religious ones. In most societies, once a daughter gets married, she goes and lives with her husband and is not compelled to return back to her parents home. But the unique characteristics of Hindu society is that after a daughter has given birth to a child, her parents come and take her and the new born baby to their home. They believe after a woman has given birth to a child, she is physically and mentally weak and needs a lot of love, care and affection. If she remained in her husband's home, she couldn't leave her household responsibilities and let her mother-in-law and other family members work. This is a wonderful feature of Hindu society.

Human beings are social animals and have to live in a society based on cooperation, peace and harmony. If a person wants to move ahead in the journey of life, they have to use gifts provided by nature properly. If a person thinks he is the greatest and tries to live alone, he cannot. They must be able to intermingle with other members of the society, get their involvement and participate in their daily activities. Rituals like shaving the hair, solid food feeding ceremony, naming ceremony and other ceremonies bind and unite people as these custom and rituals are an integral part of their lives. We must be able to research and analyze why our ancestors practiced and performed these rituals and customs. And once we understand their importance and benefits, we must educate our children to follow these customs and traditions.

Today, in the name of science based education and technology, we are discarding our traditional values and culture. We are indifferent not only to ourselves but also to our family members and friends. This is because we have drifted away from the values set by our ancestors based on gratitude, co-operation, love and affinity. The younger generation has no respect, not only for their teachers and elders but also for their parents. Parents are forgetting their duties towards their children, who are in search of proper guidance and care. If this kind of situation continues, words like love, peace, harmony, and affinity will be forgotten. When this happens, there will be nothing but chaos and confusion. The society will break up and there will be a danger that man will go back to the uncivilized state. So the present generation must think and act. Do they want confusion and disorder in society or do they want love, peace and harmony? Maybe our ancestors and seers saw what would happen to the society, if we did not follow our cultural values and traditions. So to protect the society from chaos and confusion, they handed down these traditions and values to instill discipline and responsibility in our lives, to stop the societies from disintegration.

The philosophical aspect of keeping a tuft of hair on the crown of the head is to draw the energy from the sun, as it is the vital source of life. Just imagine, without the sun the world would be in total darkness and there would be no life and activity. Without its heat and energy, nothing would survive, sustain or prosper.

The crown on our head is the meeting point of our right and left-brain. It is the softest and most delicate point of our head. Keeping the tuft of hair on the crown of the head protects this soft point. Another important aspect of the first hair cutting ceremony is that it not only unites brothers and sisters but also other family members.

Scientifically, it can be proved that black color absorbs sun light faster than other colors. If we wash a white and a black piece of cloth and put them in the sun to dry, the black cloth will dry much faster than the white. Likewise, water filled in a black bottle will heat much faster than in a white bottle. In this way we can prove, that the black tuft of hair on the crown of the head can absorb light, heat and energy of the sun much faster. In the past, it was a custom to grow a tuft of hair on the head the size of a cows hoof. According to *Ayurveda,* the tuft of hair on the crown of the head can resist more than a hundred diseases that can enter the body from this point.

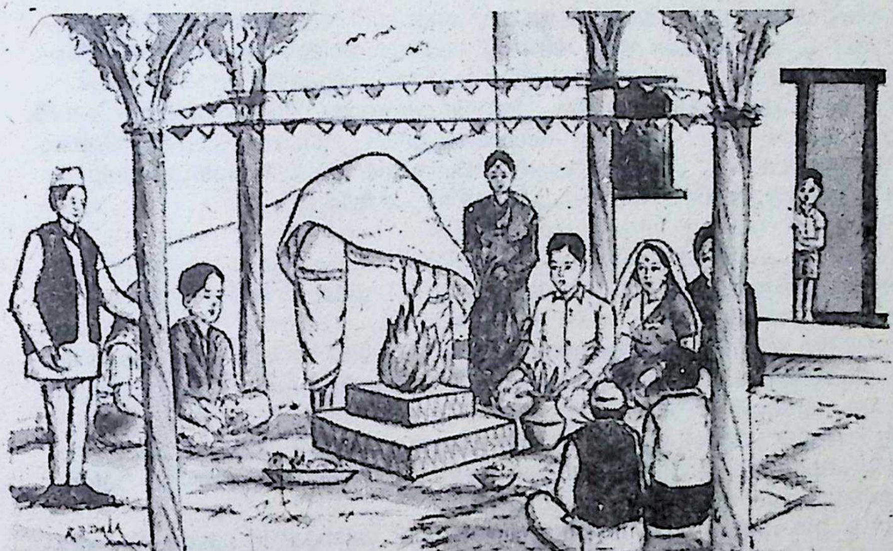
Vrata Vaṇda; Coming of Age

The *Vrata Vanda* or *Upanyan* ceremony is performed on a boy when he is seven, nine or eleven years old to make him a rightful member of the family The word *Vrata* means law and *Vanda* means to stay within. So the word *Vrata Vanda* means to stay within the law. When this ceremony is performed on a boy, he is on the verge of becoming an adolescent, has passed his primary education and is ready to go to High School. We can read the following verse in the *Manusmrti* about the importance of performing this sacrament.

Janama Jayate Sudrasankarad Dwij Uchyate:
Vedavyashee Vawed Vipro Brahmin Jayanti Brahmin:

This means when a person is born in the world he does not belong to any caste. As the various sacraments are performed on him he slowly gains *Brahmaha* hood and as he reads the Vedas and understands their meaning, he truly becomes a Brahmin. In other words, only a person who can read and understand the Vedas and Brahma is called a Brahmin.

The broad meaning of the above verse is every human being when they are born is like a lump of clay without any form or shape. Only after various rituals and sacraments have been performed on them they become a responsible member of the society.



During this ceremony the boys sexual organ is covered with a cotton cloth called *Langauti* or *Kaupin* Sanskrit. One end of the cloth is inserted to a cotton cord around his waist and the other end is inserted into the cord above his bum. Wearing the *Langauti* is to remind the boy, that he is becoming an adolescent and should be careful in everything he does and says. The cord around the waist has a knot on the right side tied by the eldest member of the family. While tying the knot incense and colored rice is offered to it praying it would never get lose. The main aim of the *Vrata-Vanda* ceremony was to control a boy's sexual desire, so that it would not hinder his growth and concentration.

During the *Vrata-Vanda* ceremony, the priest covers his and the boy's head with a long white sheet of cloth. After that, the priest whispers in the boy's ears whether he will abide by the rules and regulations of the family and society. When the boy promises, he will then the priest whispers the *Gayatri* Mantra on his right ear. He does not whisper it correctly the first time, but incorrectly several times. He does this to get the boys concentration. When the priest is satisfied that the boy has given his full concentration, he repeats the mantra correctly and tells the boy to recite the Mantra. After that, he puts a long hand woven cotton cord, called *Janai* on the boy's right shoulder with its end hanging under his left arm. There are three knots in a *Janai*, which are called *Brahmagranthi*. The meaning of these knots is that we must obey the laws through our body, mind and soul. When going to the toilet, the *Janai* should be placed over the ear. Putting the *Janai* over the ear prevents any bad things from entering the body from the ears. Another meaning for putting the J*anai* over the ears is to indicate to others, that he is unclean and has just come from the toilet. While we are bathing, we must hold the *Janai* in both our hands and recite the *Gayatri* Mantra. Once a year, on a full moon night, we must bathe and clean ourselves and then change our *Janai* for a new one. Many people take pilgrimages to holy places where there are lakes, ponds or rivers for this ceremony. The *Janai* is made by weaving nine raw cotton threads. According to the Hindu scriptures "*Greha Sutra*" The nine cords of the *Janai* represent the nine different gods that help us to travel the journey of life smoothly. And they are as follows:

1) *Brahma* is the source of all knowledge. Without knowledge, we cannot move ahead in the journey of life. It is because of our quest for knowledge that we are moving ahead.
2) *Agni* is fire without which we cannot cook our food. Fire is the witness of all our rituals and sacraments. Fire also bids us farewell from this world when we are cremated.
3) Nag is water without which nothing can survive in the world. Water is the most important element that we need to cleanse ourselves before worshipping any god.
4) *Som* is the moon, on which the Hindu lunar calendar is based. Without knowing the position of the moon and the stars, no religious performances

can take place as all the auspicious dates and moments are based on their position.

5) *Rishi* he is the founding father of our family clan, whose descendents we are. As he is our founding father, without him we would not be in this world.
6) *Prająpati* is the eldest living person of the family, leader of the society or the ruler of the country.
7) *Vayu* is the air that we are breathing in and out and without which nothing can live in this world.
8) Surya is the sun without which nothing can live in this world because without its heat, light and energy nothing can move grow or survive. Without the sun we would not know the time, day and the months of the year.
9) *Pitri* are our ancestors and forefathers, who have passed away from this world and to whom we look up to as gods and pay tribute to them

After the ceremony the priest gives a stick and a leather skin to the boy and tells him from now onwards he must live an isolated life far away from society, study and meditate. The boy circles his mother three times and tells her that he is going to visit foreign lands. The Guru takes the boy's hand and leads him away from the family. The mother at the thought of separation from her son starts crying and pleads to her brother, the boy's maternal uncle, to bring the boy back. In the hoary past the boy's uncle would take the boy up to the compound of the high school where he would be studying and tells him to go inside. But nowadays, the uncle takes the boy to different temples to worship and then takes him back to his mother. Many of the people attending the ceremony also follow them to the temples. After the boy returns home, everyone enjoys a grand feast. In the past, while everyone was enjoying the feast, the elders of the boy's family would declare to everyone present that they have witnessed the boy's *Vrata Vanda* ceremony, where he has promised to obey the rules and regulations of the family. If by chance he breaks the rules, it is the responsibilities of everyone present to advice him not to do so.

The moral and philosophical aspect of the *Vrata Vanda* ceremony is conducted to make a boy aware of his sexual organ and how to control it. Our forefathers saw the dangers that a young boy maturing sexually could face, so they started this sacrament.

In today's modern world, because of the lack of positive sex education, many sexual offences are committed. Television series and movies are all the time showing a lot of violence and sex, so the coming generations have nothing in their minds but this. Sex crime is a dangerous problem in today's world and will continue, if ceremonies like *Vrata Vanda* are not performed.

We can read in the Hindu religious book the, *Puran,* where even God Brahma, the creator of the universe, jumps and chases after his own daughter *Saraswati,* because he could not control his sexual desire. Another example of how Tara, wife of *Brihaspati* the guru of the gods, left him to stay with *Chandrama,* his pupil. Our forefather's saw, how strong the urge for sex was that even the gods became its slave. This ceremony is a part and parcel of Hindu cultural tradition, which, even today, after the invasion of western education, is still being practiced. The *Vrata Vanda* ceremony hopes to make the youth of today realize that sexual crime is very serious. It is such a terrible crime and sin, that even in heaven it is not forgiven.

Tika; Protecting the Third Eye

Hindus, after worshipping their gods, put a mark consisting of red vermilion powder mixed with water on the confluence between their eyebrows. This mark is usually red in color but can also be in other colors. In the past, this mark or *Tika* was put after daily worship or other religious functions. It was also put on a person when they were departing for a journey by their family members to wish them a safe journey. But now- days, many people put it on as a beauty mark, to brighten their faces. In the past, the color of the *Tika* represented a special meaning, but these days, with the advent of modernization, it has become a fashion to change the colors of the *Tika* according to the colors of clothes worn by a person. This trend has come, because people have forgotten the meaning and importance of the *Tika*.

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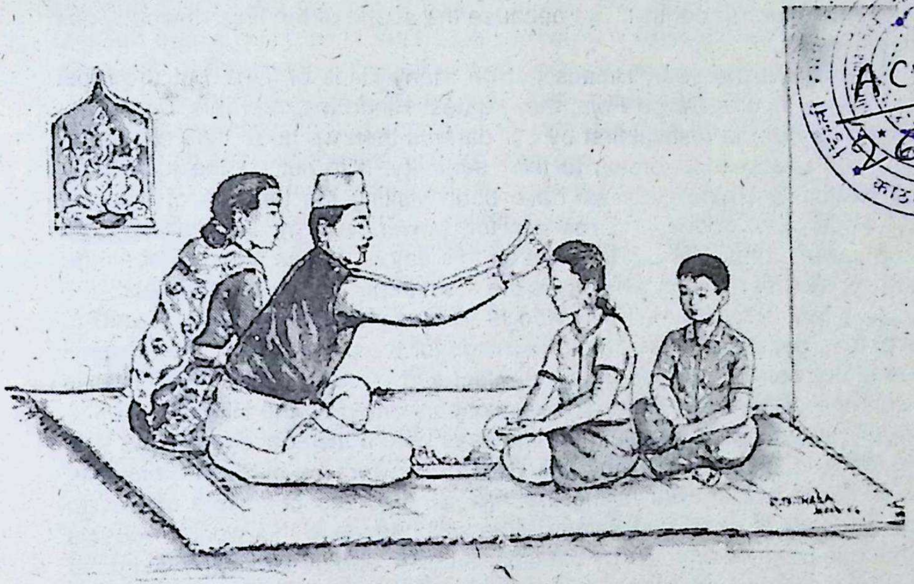


The spot where the *Tika* is put is called the command center, knowledge center or the third eye. This spot is directly connected to the tongue and the voice box in our throat. The reason for calling this spot the command or the center of knowledge is, because when a person is suddenly beset with a problem, they think and in the process wrinkle their forehead. We wrinkle our forehead as if we are searching for an answer to solve the problem. While we are thinking about the problem, our mind draws energy from a vacant spot in our stomach. After a while we breathe a sigh of relief as if we have found the answer to solve the problem. Then the command center orders the tongue to take action. The tongue immediately commands the voice box to speak out the command which we hear coming out from the mouth to solve the problem. Our tongue's function is to bring out the thoughts into action through words that we hear.

We put on different color *Tika* according to the festival we are celebrating or the god and goddess we have worshipped. The red *Tika* makes us active and smart. Sandalwood, which is yellow in color, makes us calm and alert. Likewise, black protects us from harm and danger. While putting the *Tika* on different people's forehead, we have to use different fingers according to their relationship with us. The thumb is used for elders and the ring finger for young ones. The index finger is used in memory of departed souls. When we put *Tika* on someone's forehead, our five fingers should not be joined together, because the shape of the fingers would look like a pig's head. Instead we should raise our index and little finger to put the *Tika* because the shape of the fingers would look like a deer's head.

Throughout the year, Hindus put on many kinds of *Tika,* but the most important is the *Tika* of *Durga Puja,* the greatest Hindu festival. This *Tika* is put on the tenth day of the festival first by our parents then we go to different family members and relatives according to their seniority. It is put on the tenth day, because for the last nine days we have been visiting the temples of different powerful gods and goddesses, asking for power, energy and strength to overcome our enemies. We put the Tika on this day to get the strength of all the gods and goddesses. That is why this is the most important *Tika* of the year. It is so important that a family member, who is far away from their home, come to their parents to get this *Tika* and their blessings for the coming year. If by chance a person is not able to get this *Tika,* they feel sad throughout the year. That is why this is one of the most important traditions inherited by the Hindus to unite. While visiting the different temples for nine days before the final day Hindus vow to the gods and goddesses, they will use the powers granted to them with wisdom and knowledge. After taking the *Tika* we also accept flowers offered to the gods as symbols of their blessings. What will happen to this world, if all this power that has been given to us by the different gods and goddesses is not used wisely? That is why; when we put the *Tika* we promise them that we will use the powers wisely.

According to the Hindu scriptures "*Skandapuran*" when the *Tika* is put on by the different fingers of the hands, these are their benefits.

Anamika shantida prokta madhyamah yu: karee tatha:
Angushtha: pushtida: proktastarjani mokshyadayine:

This means, the ring finger gives peace, middle gives long life, the thumb gives nourishment and the index finger gives salvation. As putting a *Tika* is a sacred act we should not bow down to just anyone nor should we put it on anyone who comes for it without understanding its importance. In the *Panchatantra* storybook of riddles and knowledge we can read the following story.

There was a very clever crippled man who could see clearly with his eyes. He wanted to work, but could not because he was crippled. One day he met a blind man who was strong and full of energy and wanted to work but could not because of his blindness. While they were thinking and discussing their problem, the crippled man suddenly said to the blind man, "Put me on your shoulders and I will teach you how to work." The blind man thought about the crippled man's suggestion, and both of them decided to work together. In this way, both of them worked together and became very successful. What we learn from this story is that the crippled man had knowledge and eye sight while the blind man had strength and energy. This story teaches us, that if right knowledge and strength are put together, we can progress.

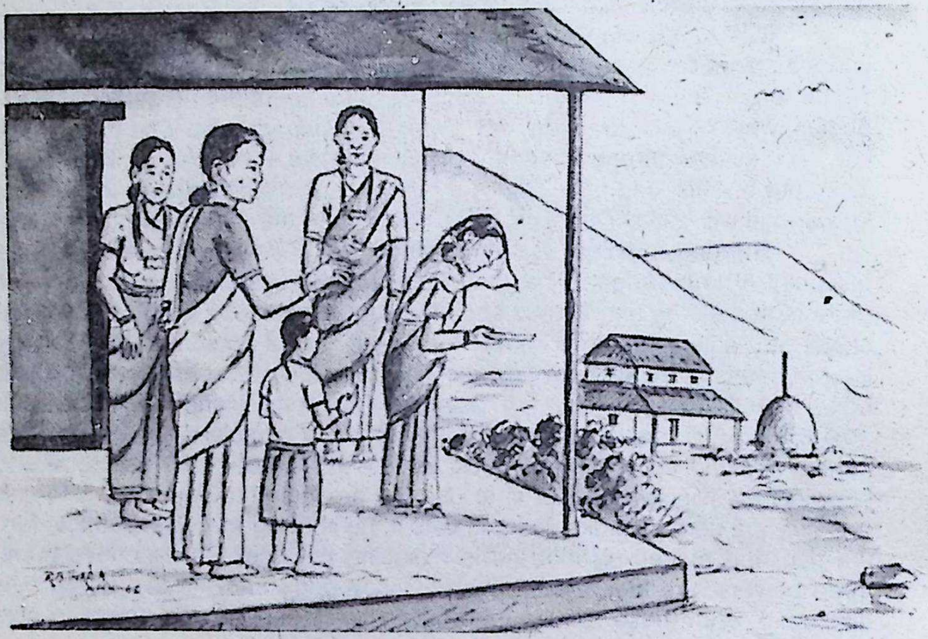
It is a common practice that men, women and children put a *Tika* of various colors as blessings of the different gods and goddesses. It is said, when we put on a *Tika* of any god or goddesses, we get their energy and power in our bodies, which we must use wisely. Similarly, *Tantriks* put a *Tika* by drawing three lines across their forehead and then they put a dot in the center of the three lines. They put on this kind of a *Tika in* the hope that their third eye or the Chakra of knowledge will open. *Tantriks* call the spot where the *Tika* is put *Gyan* chakra.

The philosophical aspect of putting the *Tika* is to open our third eye or the point of knowledge. It teaches us to humbly respect and bow down to our parents and elders and to love and bless our juniors. We should always be alert, clever and able to use our knowledge wisely. For a person to lead a successful life, he needs three kinds of power. The first is the power of knowledge to create something that he can use. For instance, if a person wants to eat, he should be able to cook. The second power is the ability to complete a given job. If a lazy person has the knowledge to cook and is lazy, what is the use of him having knowledge? The third power is to use the product created by him in the proper manner. If a person cooks rice and eats it, he is using it wisely. But if he ferments the rice and makes alcohol, he is misusing the rice. Of the above mentioned three powers, the first is the power of knowledge and the last is the power of discretion. Both these require intelligence, while the second power to complete the job correctly requires the physical power of the body.

Gufa: Training for Womanhood:

Just like the *Vrata Vandha* ceremony is held for boys coming of age, likewise a religious ceremony called *Gufa* is performed on girls, as they are on the verge of puberty. After this ceremony, a girl is not free to go where she likes do what she likes and mix with whom she likes because she become a responsible member of the family. It is her duty to uphold the pride and prestige of the family. The ways of performing this ceremony vary according to customs, traditions and beliefs of the community that she belongs to.

When a young girl has her first period or menstruation, it is but natural she wonders what's wrong with her. She examines her body for cuts and wounds and when she does not find any, she is surprised and goes to confide with the dearest person of her life, her mother. The mother is surprised and tells her, she has become a big girl and takes her to a dark room, where no sunlight can enter and leaves her there. Then she tells the other family members of the incident and talks about how to prepare for the *Gufa* ceremony. Confining the girl in a dark room can be compared to her living in a cave, because *Gufa* means cave in Nepali.



She is kept in the dark room for eleven days and is taken out on the twelfth day. While in the dark room, she plays and interacts with her friends and female members of the family. In the past matured elderly women she is near to would tell her she is no more a small, but a young lady. They would tell her to avoid men during her periods, because the discharged odor from her could arouse sexual desire in them. They tell her when female dogs are on heat they discharge blood. Male dogs, never seen in the neighborhood before, suddenly appear from nowhere, fighting with each other for her invitation. Likewise, when a cow is on heat and is discharging blood, bulls can be seen running after her in desperation. She is also told to be careful with whom she associates and to be careful in her activities, because she could become pregnant. This kind of sexual education used to be taught to them. They were also taught how to be good housewives. Other teachings like the art of cooking, cleaning, respect to elders and how to love and look after young ones.

On the twelfth day the girl is decorated like a bride and brought out of the house to be presented to Surya, the sun. The sun is the symbol of knowledge, so that she can pray and ask him to fill her with knowledge and wisdom of womanhood. She also thanks him for blessing her thus far and continues to bless her. The reason for keeping her in the dark room is to make her fair and beautiful, because exposure to the sun makes a person dark. We can see the proof of this by seeing the barley sown in the sand away from the sun for nine days during *Durga Puja*. When it is taken out on the tenth day, its color is fair and beautiful. After all the rituals and meeting with the sun god is over, all family members and friends sit together and enjoy a grand feast.

That is why our learned ancestors, seeing the danger to women during their monthly period, took measures to protect them when they were still young and ignorant. They kept them away from their daily activities to teach them the value of life.

In the past woman's activities were limited to the house and with family members. A woman was never allowed to go alone anywhere and if she had to someone would accompany her. But these days, right from their childhood, boys and girls study together, play together and work together. The woman's work place is not only limited to the house, but is everywhere. Today it is the fundamental right of women to go where ever she wants to go and do whatever she likes to do.

Though nature has made women physically weak, Hindu society has made them very strong by giving them great importance. They believe that the virginity of a woman is her pride and dignity. Hinduism believes, that the most treasured and precious jewelry that a woman has, is her virginity and she should not lose it till she gets married. In the book *Manusmiriti* it is written

Yaatra Naryastu Pujyantee Ramante Tatra Devta:

This means:: Wherever women are respected and treated well, the gods love to be there." Women have been greatly honored in Hindu society. The greatest pride and possession a woman has, is her pride, prestige and self-respect. If a woman loses her virginity, she is considered a stain and is discarded not only by her family but also by the society.

All the wonderful aspects of the past Hindu traditions and customs today are slowly being discarded by the new generation, because they are classified old fashioned and impractical. Because of this, many harmful practices have influenced the society. Evils like performing the *Gufa* ceremony before a girl has her first period, mixing with strangers, eating what they like and so on. Mothers educating their children during this period on sex, good housekeeping, respect to elders and love the young have been forgotten. Maybe because of the lack of this kind of education and discipline today, children are ruined and many homes are broken.

The philosophical aspect of the *Gufa* ceremony is that human beings should learn how to live in peace and harmony. Those, who know the art of living, are admired and praised. Those, who do not know this art, live for their own momentary, selfish gains and are shunned and frowned by society. To learn the art of living is very important to a married couple. It used to be said, happiness of the house is in the hands of the women. If she is selfish and does not know anything about good housekeeping and is impatient, the house will break up. That is why a woman should have skill and the technique to handle the house properly, because if the house breaks up, it is the woman, who is blamed. To avoid a house and family from being ruined and frowned upon, traditions and sacraments like the *Gufa* ceremony should continue, so that a girl right from her childhood is trained in all aspects of good housekeeping.

The practical aspects of the Hindu society indicate no discrimination between boys and girls and are treated equally. We can see this during various sacraments and rituals. When a boy is coming of age, his *Vrata Vanda* ceremony is performed. Likewise, when a girl comes of age, her *Gufa* ceremony is performed. We should not take it lightly but give serious thoughts as to why our ancestors performed these sacraments and rituals.

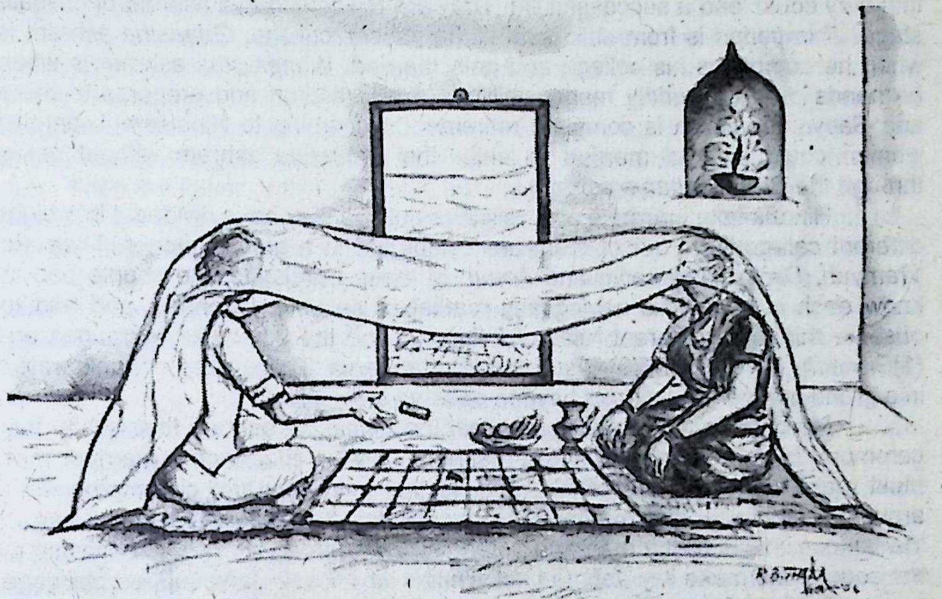
The moral aspect of the *Gufa* ceremony is that when a girl reaches her puberty or adolescence, there are many physical and mental changes that take place within her. Attractions towards men, sexual desires etc. are examples. So to protect her, Gufa ceremony was introduced.

We can read and hear stories about the *Rishi* culture that is thousands of years old. In those days, both men and women were highly educated. They were trained and taught to be responsible on all aspects of life. When a couple got married and had problems, they shared their problems with each and stood together to face them. They shared their joys and sorrows. But in today's world everyone is so independent, self centered and thinks of no one else but themselves. Words like love, patience, understanding and tolerance are absent and the result is divorce, broken homes, and misguided children. What can we expect, when there is no family values left.

Sanctity of Marriage:

Marriage is nature's gift to human beings without which no procreation can take place in the world. Marriage-practices and ceremonies vary from place to place, tribe to tribe and religion to religion. Marriage and family relationship of human beings should not be for a short period but a lifetime. Martial relationships between a man and woman should begin only after marriage.

In the Stone Age people were ignorant about the importance of marriage, because they were carefree and not governed by laws. But as time passed by people's attitude towards marriage changed. They started realizing its sanctity and importance so they formulated laws as to why people should get married.



The sages and philosopher of Hinduism gave many reasons as to why people should get married and they are as follows. In the *Mahabharat* we can read the story of Sage *Agastya* who was not married had to get married because in his dreams he would always see his ancestors dangling upside down over a bottomless pit. They were moaning and crying that they would never be free from their misery until they were reborn. The only way they could be free from their misery was if their descendents got married and had children. So to free his ancestors Sage *Agastya* got married to princess *Lopamudra* and had children from her. In this way he freed his ancestors from their misery and paid his ancestral debt. We can also read in the *Mahabharat* how king *Pandu* was humiliated and frowned upon by hermits, who refused to take him on a pilgrimage they were going to, because he did not have children. So Hindus had to also get married so that they could send the soul of their dead parents to the realm of the ancestors by giving the *Pinda Dan*. Likewise, another reason was to continue the family line. In the beginning the reason for getting married was to have a child. It did not matter whether it was a boy or a girl but later on emphasis was laid on having a boy. They believed that without a son or Putra their soul would go to pum or hell after they died. The Sanskrit word for son is *Putra* which means deliverer from hell. So to stand straight and tall in society, a person had to have a son otherwise they were frowned and scorned at.

In the past Hindus divided a person's life into four different stages, so that they could lead a successful life. They are *Brahmacharya* ashram or celibate stage. This period is from childhood till he passes college. *Grihastha* ashram is when he completes his college and gets married. *Wanprastha* ashram is when he hands over all worldly responsibilities to his children and prepares to retire and *Sanyash* ashram is complete retirement. According to Hinduism, men and women could not get married or enter the *Grihastha* ashram without going through the *Brahmacharya* ashram.

Hindus take marriage as a religious duty so they have divided it into eight different categories. Four of them are celebrated in a grand manner. They are *Vramyah, Daiva, Prajapatya* and *Aasur.* In these marriages, the couple had to know each other before having any martial or sexual relationship and had to observe thirty five different rules of intimacy. And the other four marriages are (1)*Pishach*, (2)*Raksyas*, (3)*Aasur* and (4) *Gandarva.* These were not celebrated in a grand manner and did not have to observe any rules.

Marriage is the first step to begin the *Grihastha* ashram that is why this ceremony is performed in a grand manner. When a couple gets married, they must make Agni, the god of fire, witness the ceremony and circumambulates around it; otherwise, the marriage is not considered complete. The main aim of the various rituals of the marriage ceremony is to strengthen the relationship of the couple and make it a lifetime pact. That is why theologians support marriage as a unification of two souls into one.

According to Hinduism, people getting married should not be related or be from the same clan. As far as possible they should get married within their own caste with people having good moral character. In the Hindu religious book *Manusmriti* it is written that a couple, planning to get married should not be related.

Aspinda cha ya maturasgogya cha ya pitu:
Saprasasta dwijateenam daraakarmni maithu:

This means a girl and a boy who are not related either from their mother's or father's side and are not bound to observe the annual mourning ceremony together, can get married.

In the past before a boy and girl got married their parents would examine their bodies to see whether they had any infectious disease or wounds. This was done to avoid any misunderstandings later between the two families because clothes worn by them could hide wounds or infectious disease that they may have. If the family members were satisfied with the examination, they allowed the boy and girl to meet. Only after the girl and boy were satisfied with each other, they were married.

Before the wedding ceremony, the bride's father makes the bride and groom stand in front of him and sprinkles water over their heads and asks them to say "From now onwards we have become one." Before handing over his daughter to the groom, he tells her "You have been the pride and prestige of our family, now go to your husband's home and be their pride and raise your own clan." Then the father of the bride tells the son in-law "From today I have handed over this girl to you for the salvation of both our families," meaning that they should have children. Then the groom asks the bride "Who gave you to me." The bride answers *"Kamadev* (god of desire)." The groom before accepting the bride vows in front of everyone that no matter what happens he would never abandon her and would share his joys and sorrows with her till his last breath. After that he puts a wedding necklace on her neck and red vermilion powder on the partition of her hair. She is now his official wife. After these formalities are completed they are recognized as husband and wife. The groom gives an offering to the presiding priest to make the wedding ceremony complete.

In the past after the bride and groom got married they were not allowed to stay together from three days to a year. This was done to create a desire and at the same time to increase their love and affection for each other. As they lived separately they had to control all their mental and physical emotions. And as soon as the couple met, their love and affection would be sincere and boundless. Maybe the philosophers of Hinduism made this rule to make the marriage stable and permanent. They believed, marriage was not only the concern of the couple but of two families.

The philosophical aspect of marriage is that it binds two different individuals into a family relationship. This is because human beings are social animals and cannot live alone and have to live in a society to progress in the journey of life. That is why when a person gets married his social activity and co-operation with others increases, which makes his life enjoyable and happy. After a couple gets married, there should always be love, peace and harmony, not only between the couple but the whole family. In such an environment, the question of misunderstanding and separation never arises. As marriage is considered a religious bond, it has to be performed religiously. All family members and friends of both, the bride and groom, have to be present as witnesses during the wedding ceremony. As marriage is the biggest fanfare event in a person's life, the feast following it should be an enjoyable and memorable one.

The practical and moral aspect of marriage in Hinduism is that before a couple gets married the concerned families must think seriously. After all the family members consent to the marriage then only it should be solemnized. When this kind of precedent is followed the chances of misunderstanding and divorce are minimum. And if any problems arise in the marriage both family members will intervene to solve it. The fear of two families breaking up because of a little misunderstanding between the couple does not arise. That is why marriage is looked up-to as a sacred sacrament that joins two unknown and unrelated families and brings them together. Any mistake on the part of the couple would not only jeopardize and ruin their relationship, but also of the two families. That is why in a Hindu society the chances of divorce are rare and far between.

Teej: Bliss of Marriage:

All men and women want to have honest and loving life partners, with whom they can share their joys and sorrows. They also want to have good, healthy and successful children. To get these desires fulfilled, Hindu women celebrate the festival of *Teej* or *Karwachaut* by fasting for three-days. They celebrate it with much pomp and pleasure in the following manner.

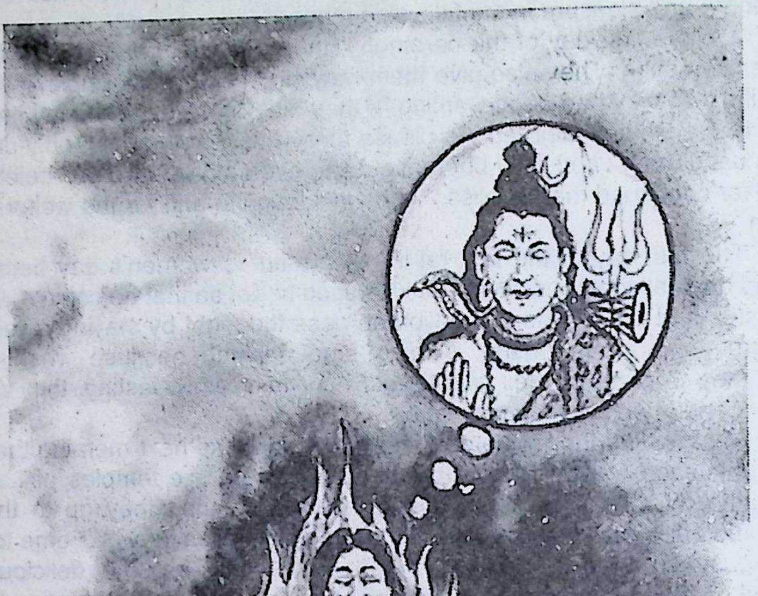
On the first day of the ceremony, the husbands bring edibles that their wives enjoy eating. They also give them new clothes and if possible, jewelry and other gifts that they had been wanting. If they did not have the money they would borrow and even sell their land to please their wives. In the past, only unmarried women used to fast and pray but these days, even married women celebrate the festival for continued marital bliss, husband's long life and for the welfare of their children.

The first day of the festival is celebrated as women's day because the husband does all the housework the wife used to do, so that he could realize how difficult it is and respect her. The women pass the night by staying awake alone or in groups chatting, eating, singing, and dancing because when morning comes, they would start their twenty-four hour fast. While fasting, they could not eat, drink and even swallow their spit.

After fasting the whole day and night, early the next morning they would go to confluence of rivers and streams where there are temples of Lord Siva. They bathe by using the herbal plant *Dateen* and then they go to the Shiva temple and offer fresh clean water and pray to him. Then they go home to pray to sage *Agustee* and his wife. Only then they would eat the delicious foods prepared by their husbands. This festival is very exciting and interesting but most women do not know its importance.

It is written in the Hindu scriptures once *Dakshyaprajapati* had a misunderstanding with his son-in-law Shiva and was thinking of humiliating him. While thinking, he suddenly got an idea to organize a grand *Yagya* and invite everyone from the three worlds. When Sati Devi saw everyone from the three worlds going towards her father's place she asked them where they were going. When they told her they were going to a *Yagya* organized by her father. She was shocked and angry at her father for not inviting her husband-the Lord of the gods *Mahadeva*. She could not bear the insult that her father had shown to them, so she went to his place and jumped into the blazing fire of the *Yagya* and killed herself. As she was a loyal and faithful wife she thought it better to die than to witness such an insult against her husband. Because of her faithfulness and integrity to her husband, she is known as Sati Devi, the goddesses of truth.

Lord Shiva in his grief carried Sati Devi's body on his shoulders and came down to earth and roamed like a mad man. And the result was the process of creation started slowing down and was on the verge of extinction. Seeing the catastrophe the world was going to face, Lord Vishnu made the body of Sati Devi to decompose and fall on the ground. After the body had completely decomposed and there was nothing left, he went back to Mount *Kailash* and started meditating. As the intensity of his meditation increased the cycles of creation started slowing down and the world was heading for total destruction but was saved when Lord *Shiva* married *Parwati*.



After Sati Devi had taken her life and Shiva was in a trance; Sati Devi was reborn as *Parwati,* the daughter of *Himavat* and Mena rulers of the Himalayas. In spite of being born a princess, *Parwati* right from her childhood was determined to marry Shiva and started to fast and meditate on him. Her meditation was so severe and sincere that she did not feel the cold of winter or the heat of summer. Although the summer heat was intense she lit blazing bonfires around her and continued with her meditation. The power of her meditation was so strong, that sweltering heat was coming out from the crown of her head and rising up into the skies. The heat of *Parwati*'s meditation was so strong that the gods could not bear it and were in panic. They were so scared, that they went to appeal to Lord Shiva and told him about *Parwati's* meditation. But when they reached his place, they found him deep in meditation and were afraid to disturb him.

Eventually, the heat coming out of *Parwati's* meditation was so strong that even Lord Shiva sitting on top of cold Mount *Kailash* could not bear it. So to find out the reason, he disguised himself as a traveler and went to the place where *Parwati* was meditating.

He asked her why she was meditating so intensely. She said she would only tell Lord Shiva the reason. Shiva said to her "Oh that insane Shiva, who does not have a house of his own nor does he know where his next meal is coming from? He is a naked mendicant, what more can I say about him?" While hearing these insults against Shiva, *Parwati* got very angry and was about to curse him. But before she could he revealed himself to her. *Parwati's* happiness knew no bounds at seeing him. Shiva asked her why she was meditating so intensely to draw his attention. *Parwati* told him "I mediated to get you as my husband, so please accept me as your wife." He was so pleased with her, that he accepted her as his wife. After that they lived happily and the cycle of creation that had stopped, began again.

Since then, women have observed the festival of *Teej* or *Karwachauth* with the hope of getting a good husband. Even today women still fast and meditate like *Parwati* with the hope that the gods will bless them with good husbands. The sincere and intense power of *Parwati's* meditation made even Lord Shiva appear before her to fulfill her wish. The following verse describes the importance of the fast taken by women during *Teej.*

Yanikani cha papani Brahmahatyasamane cha:
Taani sarvani nashyantu mey Haritalikabrataa:

This means, even the greatest sin of killing a Brahman will be washed away, if a person fasts during the *Haritalika Teej.* In Hinduism, the Brahmin is kept at the highest place of honor, because he is their religious leader, bestows knowledge and guides all the other three castes whenever they seek his advice.

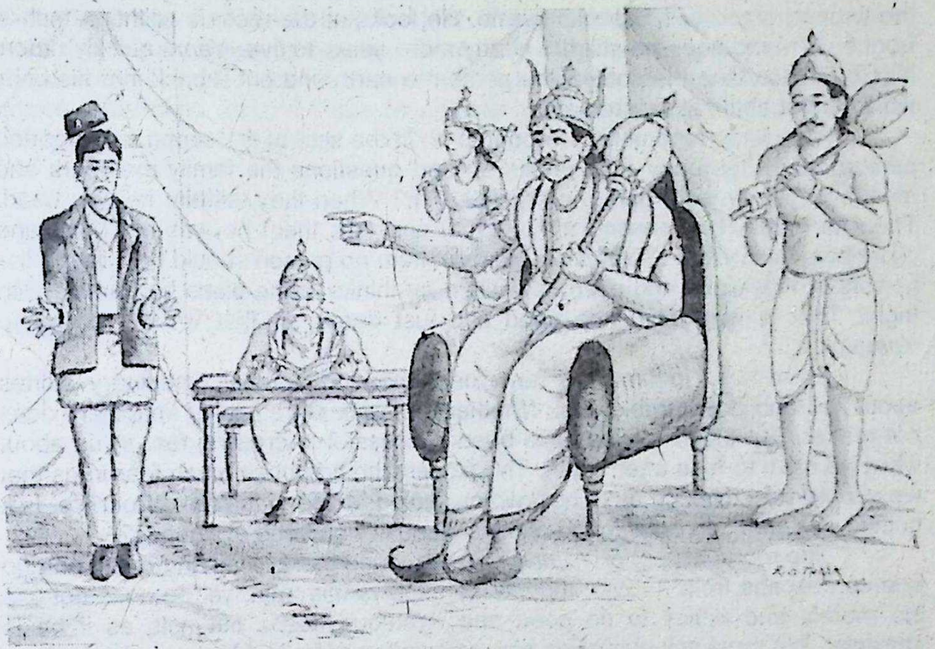
When we read and hear stories from the Hindu scriptures, they are interesting and seem impossible to apply in our practical life. But from the philosophical point, we find there are a lot of important lessons hidden in these stories, which we can apply in our lives.

From the Philosophical point we can say Goddess *Parwati's* sincere devotion shook the god of the gods, *Mahadeva*, to be present in front of her and grant her a boon. Her determination penetrated the indifferent attitude that Shiva had towards the world. This story of *Parwati's* devotion shows us, what a person can do when they are sincere and dedicated. This is an important lesson, we, the present generation, should understand and put into practice. A princess of the Himalayas drew herself within herself so that the cold of the winter and heat of the summer did not wave her devotion. It was only after Shiva and *Parwati* got married, the cycle of creation, that had stopped, began to move again. We can say, Shiva represents the masculine power and *Parwati, the* feminine. Masculine power is knowledge and feminine power is action. Only when knowledge and action are properly utilized, the work will be performed successfully. Only having knowledge of cooking denotes Shiva and is not enough to cook. There should also be things like potatoes, a pot, water and fire which denote feminine power, or Sati Devi. Shiva represents knowledge and *Parwati* represents action. We must understand without the male and female being together, no creation can take place. With the absence of one, the other is useless. This is the message we have to understand from this story.

A woman is responsible not only for looking after the welfare of the house and the family but also the husband. We can say is the most important and active person in the family. That is why women observe the festival of *Teej* or *Karwachauth* with the that hope; they will be blessed with a good husband, who will be their lover, guardian and provider. It is the women who gives birth to a child and looks after its every need. She is the one who informs the husband about the child's needs, house hold expenses and any other thing that arises. If the wife is the kinetic force of the house, the husband is the stagnant force. He only moves when she tells him. Just like in the case of Shiva, who was inactive and stagnant, but the minute *Parwati* entered his life, creation began.

Yamraj: God of justice

After a person dies his soul is taken to *Yamraj* the god of death and justice. He is green in complexion, wears red clothes and is always angry looking. He has long jutting teeth and his stare is so penetrating that people shake with fright. He has a flower sticking out from the hair of his head. In his right hand he holds a big club and in his left a lasso. His vehicle is the water buffalo. He looks so terrifying and fierce that the inhabitants of the three worlds tremble with fear. He is the keeper of the Southern direction and is the son of Surya and *Sandhya,* his son's name is *Dhumorana*.



Yamraj is the god of justice and judges all the actions a person does while they were in the world. After a person dies, Yamraj's soldiers take his soul to *Yamalok*. There the person sees *Yamraj* sitting on the throne of justice, listening to *Chitragupt,* the record keeper, describing all the different actions and activities that the person had done when they were in the world. While listening to the deeds of the person *Yamraj* from time to time grunts, interrupts the hearing in anger and scolds the person saying, "You were sent to the world to do good and righteous deeds. For this you were given five sense organs and five active organs along with a brain. Instead of doing good deeds you did nothing but wicked and evil deeds. We did not send you into the world as an animal or an insect but as a human being, much superior than them. Instead you were worse than the animals and had no conscience what so ever." After scolding and telling the person all his wrongs, *Yamraj* sends him to the place, where his deeds lead him.

A person should be cremated only after four hours and forty minutes after their death because sometimes *Yamraj's* soldiers by mistake take a wrong person to *Yamalok*. When a wrong person has been taken to *Yamalok* and his deeds are read out to him, the person suddenly gets angry and challenges the accusations, saying they are not his deeds. If a person time and again denies the charges, *Yama* looks at *Chitragupt* as if asking "Have you brought the right person?" *Chitragupt* again checks his records and finds the soldiers have brought the wrong person with a similar name. He looks at the records of the person in front of him and sees he still has many more years to live. *Yama* quickly orders his soldiers to take the soul of the person to earth and put it back into his body which is just about to be cremated.

When the funeral fire is about to be lit the soul of the supposed departed person enters his body and he sits up and questions the family members and friends why they were going to cremate him? When they tell him he was dead. Then he recalls his meeting with *Yamraj* and tells them he was not dead and describes the horrors of *Yamalok*. He tells them no person should go through the horrors of that place and even now when he thinks of the place he tremble with fright. That is why let us do good and just deeds so that we do not go to *Yamalok*.

From time to time we have been hearing horrible, imaginary stories about hell and how terrible it is. Whether the stories are real or imaginary does not matter. But these stories have been successful in creating fear in us about what we have to face after death. The stories should put so much fear in us that we should start thinking as to how we are going to spend the rest of our life. Is it going to be spent on doing good and just deeds or bad and evil deeds?

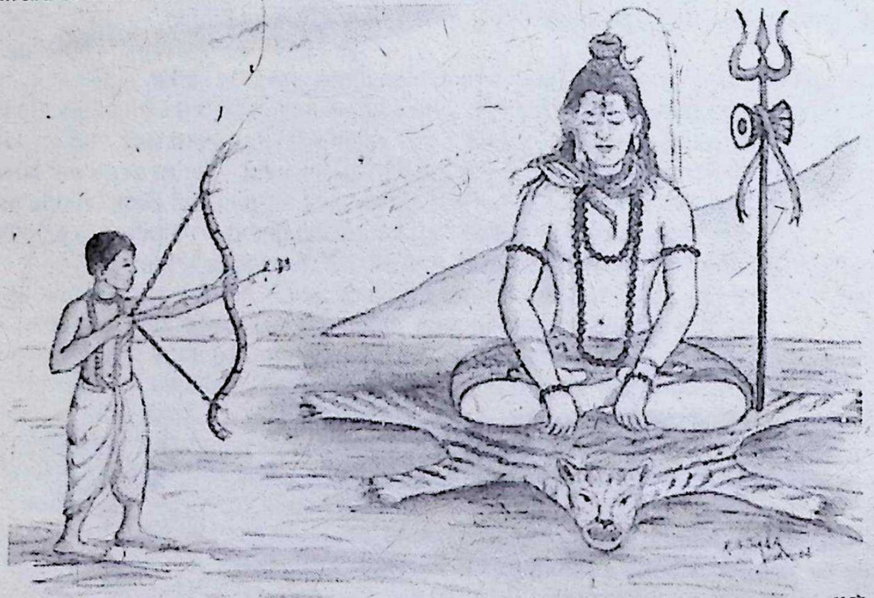
The moral aspect of *Yamraj* is in this world there is life and death and no one can escape from it. Even though man knows this truth, yet he does not use his morals and ethics to do good and righteous deeds but acts as if he is immortal. We must ask ourselves how we want our family, friends and neighbors to remember us after we have departed from this world-as a kind and loving person or selfish, cruel and arrogant. I am sure everybody wants to be remembered fondly. Likewise, we will also be judged by *Yama* according to our thoughts, deeds and actions. As long as we are in the world the choice is ours whether to be a good or a bad person.

The philosophical aspect of *Yamraj* is that we should realize we have come into the world not only to do good and righteous deeds, but also to spread brotherly love and affection. If we deal with everyone in a sweet and gentle manner, we will realize the true meaning of life which means eternal salvation or freedom from the cycles of birth and death. We must realize that when we leave this world we take nothing with us. Even the breath of air we are breathing is borrowed from this world and must return it on our death. We came empty handed and go empty handed. When we leave this world we will not only leave our good and bad deeds but also take them with us. We will stand alone in front of *Yamraj* to bear the consequences of our deed and there will be no one to support us. That is why let us only do good and righteous deeds for eternal salvation. We know after life there is death and we cannot escape from this fact. Death is behind us and is always chasing us. So let us think and act in such a way that we can complete the journey of life for eternal salvation. If the fear of *Yama* was not there in this world it would have been full of chaos and there would be no moral values and ethics. People would do whatever they liked, without thinking for others. It is the fear of facing *Yamraj* and his deep staring eyes that we are trying to live disciplined lives. That is why every religion of the world created a place called Heaven, where righteous people went and Hell, where the wicked went. If these two places were not there nobody could have lived peacefully in this world.

Kam Dev: God of Desires:

Dakshyaprajapati, father-in-law of Lord Shiva, was going to hold a lavish *Yagya*. He invited everyone from the three worlds but, not his daughter Sat Devi and son-in-law Shiva. When Sati Devi saw everyone from the three worlds heading towards her father's house, she asked them where they were going. They told her, they were going to her father's house for the *Yagya* celebration he was organizing. When she heard their answers, she was surprised, she and her husband, the Lord of the gods, Shiva, had not been invited. She asked Shiva if he knew anything about the *Yagya*. He told her, he didn't know anything about it. She felt so humiliated and angry by her father's action, that she went to where he was organizing the *Yagya* and jumped into its fire and killed herself. After Sati Devi's death, Shiva was so depressed and sad that he started passing his days in meditation on Mount *Kailash*. He was so engrossed in meditation that he did not care for the affairs of the world and its creation. And the result was that life started coming to a complete halt, as there was no creation.

During this same period Demon *Tarkasur* had defeated the gods and captured Heaven and sent the gods fleeing for their lives. The gods knew, only the son of Shiva could save them from this demon because only he could defeat him in battle. They had gone time and again to Shiva to tell him about their problems but every time they went they found him in deep meditation and were afraid to disturb him.



The gods were in a dilemma as to how to overcome their problem and were discussing about it when all of sudden they thought why not go to *Kam Dev* and ask him to help them. After *Kam* Dev heard the sad plight of the gods he decided to help them. *Kam Dev* with fear in his heart went to Mount *Kailash* to tell Shiva about the problem of the gods.

When he reached Mt. *Kailash,* he saw Shiva in deep meditation. So he decided to fill Shiva's mind with sexual desire.. When sexual desire entered *Shivas* mind he got very angry and opened his third eye to see who the intruder was. As Shiva opened his eyes, *Kam Dev* was turned into ashes. In the fraction of a second that Shiva had opened his eyes he saw beautiful *Parwati* the reincarnation of Sati Devi in deep meditation, seeking him to be her husband. The minute he saw *Parwati,* he fell in love with her and married her. After their marriage a son by the name of Kumar was born to them.

Kumar the son of Shiva and *Parwati* attacked the demon *Tarkasur* and defeated him in battle and chased him away from Heaven. All the gods returned to Heaven and started living in peace.

In the *Purands* there are many stories about the origin of *Kam Dev.* The most accepted is, that after *Brahma* created the ten *Prajapatis,* he also created a young woman called *Sandhya,* who was so beautiful, that not only Brahma but all the *Prajapatis* were amazed by her beauty. They were so intoxicated by her beauty, that all of them were hypnotized and started losing their emotional control. At that very moment a handsome young man was born from the mind of Brahma. The young man looked at Brahma staring at *Sandhya* and said "*Kamdarpayami*", which means, "Who should be proud of me." Brahma said "Let the minds of people be the target of your arrows." From that moment onwards people's minds have been targeted by this young man, who is known as *Kam Dev*. *Kam Dev* is a very handsome young man whose complexion is shiny gold and is wears a lot of jewelry. In one of his hands, he holds a bow made from sugar cane, and in the other; he is holding five arrows made from sweet smelling flowers, dripping with desires. If anybody is targeted by his arrows, they will fall in love with things of the world and forget their rights and duties. The names of the five arrows of *Kam* Dev are: (1) *Lambini,* (2) *Nawini* (3) *Brawiki,* (4) *Marini* (5) and *Vhetini.*

Kam Dev creates ambitions and desires in a person's mind without which they would not have any energy and strength to move. When people are born in this world, their body, mind and soul are all aligned. But as they grow and time passes by, the arrows of *Kam Dev* start hitting them filling their minds with all kinds of desires like what to wear, what to eat, where to go and so on. These wants and desires are a never ending cycle. No matter how wonderful a possession a person has they will look at someone else's with jealousy and envy. They have a nice house but they see somebody else's house better, they have a beautiful wife but someone else's wife is more beautiful etc. *Kam Dev* has trapped them in the materialistic things of the world. They are never happy and satisfied with what they have and are always roaming about here and there, looking at other people's possessions. Infatuated by materialism such people will never have freedom from attachments that are found abundantly in the world and will always be frustrated and unhappy.

Such a person will be tied to the cycle of life surrounded by love, cravings, lust and sex. We should try to free ourselves from this cycle of life by not letting *Kam Dev* control our lives but by realizing as to who we really are. We must be content and satisfied with things we possess. Then only we will have peace and happiness and be free from the cycle of life. When we were born, our bodies, minds and souls were united. But as we grew up this unity is broken but again unites when we are going to die and leave the world. So let us be content and happy and believe in the motto of our ancestors "Contentment is happiness or "Maximum happiness with minimum consumption"

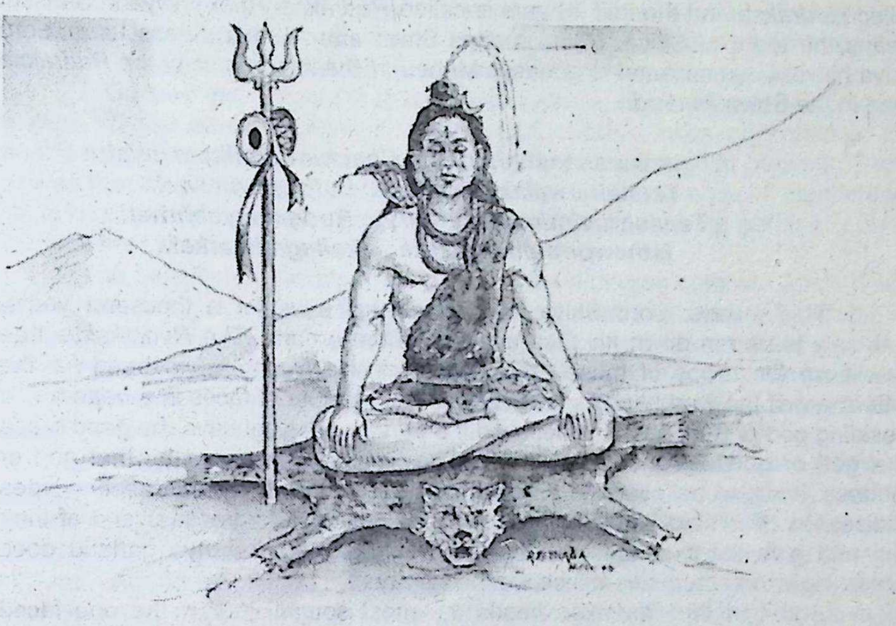
Kam Dev is one of the most important gods of the Hindus. He stirs the minds of the gods, demons and humans to be active. According to *Tantra Sashtra*, he is the son of *Maha* Tripura *Sundari*. *Kam Dev's actual* name is *Manoj* which means the form created by desire of the mind. It is written in the Hindu scriptures, that *Indra,* the king of the gods, and *Chandrama* (moon), misused the power of Kam Dev and had to face a lot of humiliations in front of the gods.

The philosophical aspect of *Kam Dev* is that he creates envy and desire in our minds, without which the world would not move. It is because of the power of desire that we get the strength and energy to reach our goals. Everything in the world has a good and a bad side that is why a person should distinguish between them otherwise, he will go astray. The sages abstained from sex and encouraged others to do the same. What would happen to this beautiful world if everyone listened to the sages? There would be no creation and when this happens, who is going to enjoy and consume the wonderful things produced by Mother Nature? If there is no creation, even knowledge would be useless because there would be no one seeking it.

These days, because of the craze for sex; many dangerous crimes are being committed in the world. That is why we must control our sexual urges and stay within the laws of society and nature and use our sexual power in a proper manner. Great people can be born through controlled sex. We should not totally abstain from sex and at the same time should not be its slave. Just like *Kam Dev* had stirred desire in Shiva's mind, he could have had more children but was happy with just one. That one son became so great that he destroyed the demon king and his followers, a feat which all the gods, though united, could not accomplish.

Rudrakshya: The Auspicious bead

The Hindus worship the *Rudraksa* tree because they believe it grew from the tears of Lord Shiva. It grows in Nepal, India, Indonesia and a few other countries of the world. The fruit of the tree is called *Rudraksa* and is shaped like a round bead. It has grooves running from its top to the bottom. The grooves are called mukh (face) or the faces of the *Rudraksa* bead. It is believed the number of faces on a bead has different significance and meanings. In the *Siva Purand* it is written if a person owns a Rudraksa bead or wears one that is touching their body they will be free from all kinds of sins that they may have committed knowingly or unknowingly. It also mentions that a *Rudraksa* bead can have from one to fourteen faces.



The beads are found in four different colors, white, red yellow and black. The four colors of the bead should be worn by the four castes of the Hindus according to their occupation. White should be worn by Brahmans, red by *Chetris*, yellow by *Vaisya* and black by *Sudras.* We can see pictures of Shiva wearing garlands made from *Rudraksa* on his head, arms and around his neck. Most people wear the *Rudraksa* garlands for religious reasons and do not know its other wonderful qualities. People have overcome many problems and have also been cured of many diseases by wearing it.

The origin and greatness of the *Rudraksa* tree is described by Lord Shiva to Goddess *Maheshni* in the Hindu scriptures *Shiva Purand* It is written that Brahma was so pleased with demon *Tripurasur's* penance that he granted him a boon. *Tripurasur* asked for a boon that he could defeat all the gods and become the emperor of the three worlds. After he got the boon, he started attacking the gods and chased them away from heaven and started harassing and persecuting them. When the persecution became unbearable the gods went to Lord Shiva and begged him to save them from the demon. While hearing their plight, Shiva started meditating on how to destroy *Tripurasur.* While he was mediating, he suddenly blinked his eyes and tears started rolling down his cheeks and fell on the ground. Trees started sprouting from the tears. This tree is called *Rudraksa* and the fruit it bears is called *Rudraksa. Rudrakshya* in Sanskrit means the tears of Shiva. *Rudra* means Shiva and *Akshya* means tears. Lord Shiva himself has narrated to goddess Maheshni the importance of the *Rudraksa* bead in the Shiva *Purand.*

Divyarwarshasahaistriestu Chachurunmilitam myal:
Tadhaharwalakuladachna: Patita jalvindwal:
,Tenashruvinduvirjata maryte Rudrakshyabhrhal:
Isthawortuamnuprapta Lokanugrahkarkall:

This means: Lord Shiva had closed his eyes for a thousand years. Suddenly tears ran down his face and fell on the ground. The *Rudrakshya* tree grew from the drops of those tears and bore the *Rudraakshya* bead for the betterment of the world and its inhabitants. The number of faces in a bead has a presiding god or goddess. It is believed if a person does not have the good grace of a god or goddess they should wear the Rudraksa presided by that god or goddess. It is also believed the different faced of the Rudraksa cures many types of diseases. It is said Lord Shiva gave these beads to forgive mankind of their sins and give them peace. If a person wearing a *Rudrakshya* garland does something wrong their sins will be washed away.

Amongst the *Rudraksa* beads the most sought after is the one faced bead as it represents Lord Shiva. It is believed all desires are fulfilled and sins forgiven if a person wears this *Rudraksa*. The presiding god of a two faced *Rudraksa is Ardhnareshwari* Shiva and his wife *Shakti.* It is also believed, that the various gods and goddesses reside in the different faced *Rudraksa.* If a person is not favored by a certain planet or god and goddess, they should wear the *Rudraksa* that represents them. Two *Rudrahshyas j*oined together are called *Gauri* Shankar or Shiva *Parwati.* Some of the beads even have a piece sticking out of it, which looks like an elephant trunk and is called Ganesh *Rudraksa.* We can also see three *Rudraksa* joined together, called *Trijyoti*

It is believed by wearing *Rudrakshya* in different parts of the body will cure many diseases like blood pressure, mental disorder, skin disease and so on. It is also believed by wearing the *Rudraksa*, it balances the flow of magnetic power, electric energy and circulation of blood in the body. If a person has a lot of problems, like bad luck, mental tensions, bad dreams etc. goes to an astrologer, he will advise the patient to wear *Rudrakshya* according to the disorder. *Fakirs* or *Sadhus* know the medicinal values of *Rudrakshya* that is why they always kept them in a water container they carried with them.

A *Rudrakshya* garland should always touch the skin of the wearer. People, while meditating, rotate the beads with different fingers. By doing this, they get relief from many diseases, because many of the organs in our bodies are connected directly to the meridian center of our fingers.

It is believed only three one-faced beads grow on a tree. Out of which one goes to the upper world, the other goes to the lower and the last one falls on the earth. That is why the single faced *Rudrakshya* is very rare and expensive.

A Garland made from the following six types of *Rudrakshya* should never be worn. Those eaten by insects, broken, cut, without holes and cracked. A garland made from the Rudrarkas beads should have a knot tied between each bead so that they don't touch each other. After tying the two ends of the garland with a knot, another bead is added and then the final knot of the garland is tied. This final knot is called *Meru* Parbat

The benefits of Rudraksa are if by chance a person commits a sin, it will be washed away; it protects a wearer from bad elements and if a person is meditating and rotating the beads with the fingers it will aid the mediator to reach higher levels of spiritualism. Before wearing a garland, it should be sanctified by water and sacred verses should be chanted on it. Only after going through this ritual, it will benefit the wearer.

In the past, Sages and *Rishis* were pious and emphasized the religious aspects of *Rudraksa.* Likewise, our ancestors were also very religious minded and never questioned the importance of wearing it. Sages and *Rishis* knew both the medicinal andS other values of the *Rudrakshya* that is why they gave it religious importance so that we would continue to wear them. Now day's scientists have started research and experiments on its importance. Most people today laugh at religious practices as blind faith or superstition but if observed closely it is the religious practices that have helped in instilling knowledge and physical fitness in human beings. This is a fact that has been experienced by people.

The benefits of the *Rudrakshya* are three fold: religious, mental and physical. When a person suffers from disease, he is mentally tense and worried and his senses do not react. People wearing the *Rudrakshya* say it keeps them physically, mentally and spiritually fit. They also witness intense love, peace and harmony in their lives.

Laxmi: Goddess of Prosperity:

Every year after harvesting the rice crop, Hindus celebrate the festival of *Laxmi puja* or *Deepawali*. This festival is celebrated in honor of Goddess Laxmi-the Goddess of Wealth and Prosperity. As Hinduism is based on the lunar calendar, its celebration varies between the months of October and November. This festival is celebrated to offer thanks to Goddess *Laxmi* for filling their granaries. It is also celebrated in memory of Lord Ram and his wife Sita, hero and heroine of the Hindu epic *Ramayan* who returned to their home *Aayodhya* after an exile of fourteen years. The citizens of Aayodhya welcomed them by lighting up their homes and the city.

The Hindus celebrate *Laxmi puja* in a season of bliss and harmony by cleaning and lighting up their homes. They worship the cow because she symbolizes Mother Earth and Goddess *Laxmi*. They also worship her because she gives milk from which curd, butter and ghee is made. But the most important reason why they worship her is for her dung. The dung is used as fertilizer, mopping the floors of the houses and the worship room. It is a vital ingredient that no ritual can take place without the floors being mopped with a mixture of the dung and red mud to sanctify the place. The most important quality of the dung is that it acts as a disinfectant, protects the house from all kinds of bacteria and disease.

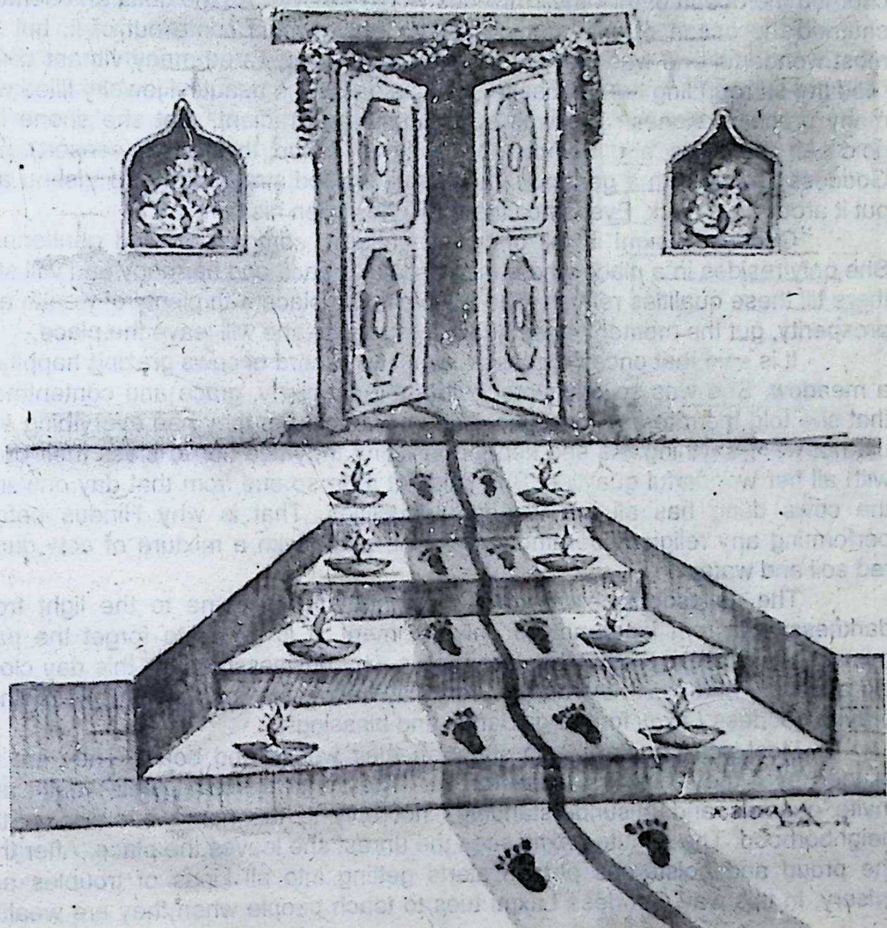
In the past, owning cows was a status symbol because if a person owned a lot of them they were considered to be wealthy. In Hinduism, if a person wanted to honor their teacher or the family priest they would present them a cow. The Hindus believe that after a person dies they have to catch the tail of a cow to cross the river *Baitarni* to go to Heaven. That is why before a Hindu dies, they want to donate a cow to a Brahman so that they can go to Heaven. Because of all these importance's, Hindus consider the cow to be a symbol of *Laxmi* not only as the goddess of wealth and prosperity but also as the goddess of love and compassion.

On the auspicious morning of Laxmi puja, houses are all cleaned and washed. A path is made from the main entrance of the house to the granary or the place where the wealth of the house is kept. The path is made from a mixture of cow dung and red mud. After that the cow of the house is washed and cleaned; then they worship her by offering all kinds of fruits and vegetables she likes. Those who do not have a cow go to a neighbor who has one. Later on, that same evening on the path leading to the treasury white footprints are made and lamps lit because Hindus believe Goddess *Laxmi* comes at night to multiply their wealth.

Hindus believe when a person is worshipping Goddess Laxmi their mind should be filled with love, peace and compassion. In the Mahabharat it is written.

Dhriti:shamo dam: saucham karunayanam wagnishthural:
Mitranam charyamudro: saptaita: samedha: shreyal:

This means Goddess *Laxmi* seeks the following seven qualities in a person who wants to worship her. They should be kind, loving, patient, faithful, control their mind and keep their body pure. Then only she will bless the devotee in everything.



Hindus treat their women as representatives of Mother Earth. On the night of *Laxmi puja,* women gather in groups and go to their friends and relatives homes asking for gifts like money, snacks and fruits. While asking for the gifts they sing and dance in company with music. Sometimes even the people giving the gifts get carried away by the festive atmosphere and join the group. When the singing and dancing party is presented with gifts from the house owner they bless them by saying "May your fortunes increase many fold." In the villages these singers and dancers must visit every house of the village even if it takes the whole night.

There are many stories as to how Goddess *Laxmi* originated. But the most accepted one is: once the gods and demons were in a lot of difficulties. They went to Brahma and asked him to save them. Brahma told them if they churned the ocean of milk their miseries would be over. As the gods and demons churned the ocean of milk many precious items would come out of it, but the most wonderful one was Goddess Laxmi. As she appeared many vibrant colors filled the surrounding area because she was decked in beautiful jewelry filled with many precious stones. She was so beautiful and radiant, that she shone like gold. All the gods and demons begged her to be their wife (consort). But Goddess *Laxmi*, with a garland in her hand, walked straight to Lord Vishnu and put it around his neck. Ever since then, she has been his consort.

Goddess Laxmi is full of beauty, charm, compassion and gentleness. She only resides in a place where there is love, peace and harmony and will stay there till these qualities remain. She will bless the place with plenty of wealth and prosperity, gut the moment these qualities are gone she will leave the place.

It is said that once Goddess *Laxmi* saw a herd of cows grazing happily in a meadow. She was so enchanted with their simplicity, grace and contentment that she told them to ask for a boon. The cows told her they had everything and did not want anything. As she kept on insisting they told her to bless their dung with all her wonderful qualities. She said: let it be so and from that day onwards the cows dung has all her wonderful qualities. That is why Hindus before performing any religious ceremony mop the place with a mixture of cow dung, red soil and water.

The philosophical aspect of *Laxmi puja* is to come to the light from darkness and from ignorance to enlightenment. It is a day to forget the past mistakes and begin a new chapter. That is why businessmen on this day close old accounts and start new ones. Every day before starting their business, they pray to goddess *Laxmi* for her guidance and blessings.

Most rich people like to show off their wealth and boast. They are so blinded by it they think it's theirs forever. They start misusing their wealth and invite quarrels and misunderstandings not only in the home but also in the neighborhood. The minute *Laxmi* sees the unrest she leaves the place. After that the proud and boisterous person starts getting into all kinds of troubles and misery. In this way Goddess Laxmi tries to teach people when they are wealthy and prosperous they should be kind, loving and sharing. A person who is rich and wealthy should realize Goddess *Laxmi* though kind, loving and generous, does not have the patience to stay with a miserable person. That is why they should realize Goddess *Laxmi* is gentle and peaceful but at the same time she is also very lively and does not like to stay in a place for a long time. They should realize the day she leaves them for another place they will be ruined. Goddess *Laxmi* can be worshipped on any day of the week but the best day is Saturday.

Human beings are full of bad qualities but the worst one is the habit of starting and doing things in a hurry without proper planning. Any person that has this habit will always face many problems and realize their mistakes only after it is too late.

The philosophy of *Laxmi puja* is not only to enjoy the festivities but also to look back on the past year and evaluate the failures and success. If we have committed mistakes then we have to think seriously as to where we went wrong. On the day of *Laxmi puja*, if a person abides by the above facts and rules of celebrating it the person will never fac failures. That is why spiritual minded people take goddess *Laxmi* as a source of power and energy. They fill their mind with her light and move from the darkness to light. That is why such people celebrate this day as a day of knowledge, light and hope. When Goddess Laxmi feels the qualities she likes is not present in a person or place she will leave.

Nag: Protector from enemies

Most people in the world are scared of snakes, because right from their childhood they have been told that snakes are poisonous and their bite can kill them. People of Hindu society are taught to respect and worship a reptile that looks like a snake which is called *Nag*. They are hooded benign snakes that play a special role in a Hindus life. One of the strands of the cotton chord they wear around their neck represents the *Nag*. We can see their importance by looking at pictures of Lord Shiva, who has a *Nag* around his neck, wrist and arms. We can also see pictures of Lord Vishnu, lying on *Shesh Nag*. Figures of *Nags* can be seen in temples and other holy places. People, who are ignorant about Hinduism are surprised why Hindus not only worship the Nags but also feed and keep images of them around their homes and temples. A person does not die from a *Nag*'s bite because they are not poisonous. *Nags* are red, yellow and green in color whereas snakes are black.

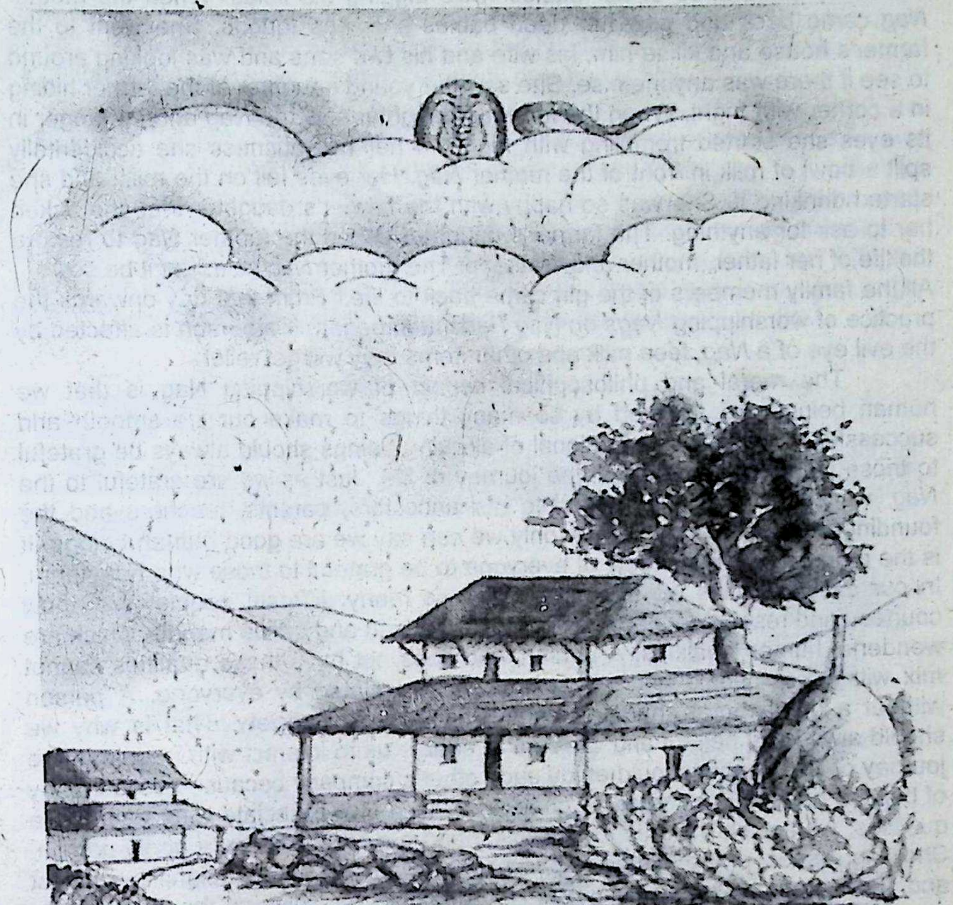
The Nags are so important to the Hindus that they worship them every day early in the morning. Once a year on the occasion of *Nag Panchami* they paste pictures of *Nags* above the main entrance of their house.

According to Hinduism there are eight kinds of *Nags*. They are *Shesh Nag*, the one on which Lord Vishnu reclines on. Then there is *Vasuki* whose upper part of the body is a human and lower a snake. *Karkat Nag* resides in a pond in Kathmandu. The other nags are *Tachak*, *Padma*, *Kuler*, *Mahapadma* and *Shankapal*. When the gods and the demons churned the ocean of milk they used the king of Nags *Vasuki* as a rope. The place where they reside is called *Patal* and the place where gods reside is called Swarga. The *Nag is* an integral part of Hinduism because it represents water without which nothing can survive.

Hindus before laying the foundation of a new house or temple call a priest to perform the foundation rites. He first searches for the house of the *Nag* on the plot before the building is going to be constructed. Once he finds it, he leaves a small passage for the *Nag* so that it can come and go as it likes. After the building is constructed the passage left for the *Nag* is used as the main drain of the house. The Hindus believe if by chance a building has been constructed on top of a *Nag's* house it can collapse when the *Nag* moves in and out of its place. From time to time the owner of the building puts food like milk, curd, rice and other edible items, which *Nags* like to eat, outside the main drain of the house. When the Nag comes to eat the food and leaves it has cleaned the drain of the house. In this way they have kept the owner of the house free from disease that could have accumulated in the main drainage of the house. That is why once a year before the rainy season when the *Nags* are asleep all the drains, taps, wells and springs in the area are cleaned and food is kept for the *Nags* to eat when they get up. Hindus celebrate this day as *Sitthi* and eat different kinds of specially prepared food. When Hindus see a snake they will not kill it but divert it to a drain or hole because they believe if it is killed it will rain.

The *Vasuki Nag* is so important in the *Pashupatnath* area of Nepal that before worshipping Lord Shiva; he has to be worshipped first.

On the day of *Nag Panchami* Hindus paste a picture of a *Nag* above the main door of the house and the treasury box. On this day It is said no human being will die of snakebite. Hindus pray and respect them because they provide water without which nothing can survive in the world. It is believed that if we worship them no lightening will ever strike the house. They not only protect human beings but also the gods. That is why there are many images of them around the walls and above the doorway of Hindu temples.



Nag is one of the six family Gods that Hindus worship every day in gratitude for their services. We can see elderly people before eating or drinking their food offer a bit of it to the *Nags* in gratitude for their services. Hindu culture and tradition has disciplined them to honor, respect and be grateful to those, who have provided for them. Now days Hindus are forgetting their cultural values and copying other peoples ways. There are many myths and stories as to why Hindus worship the *Nags* on *Nag Panchami.* Amongst the many stories the following, is the most interesting.

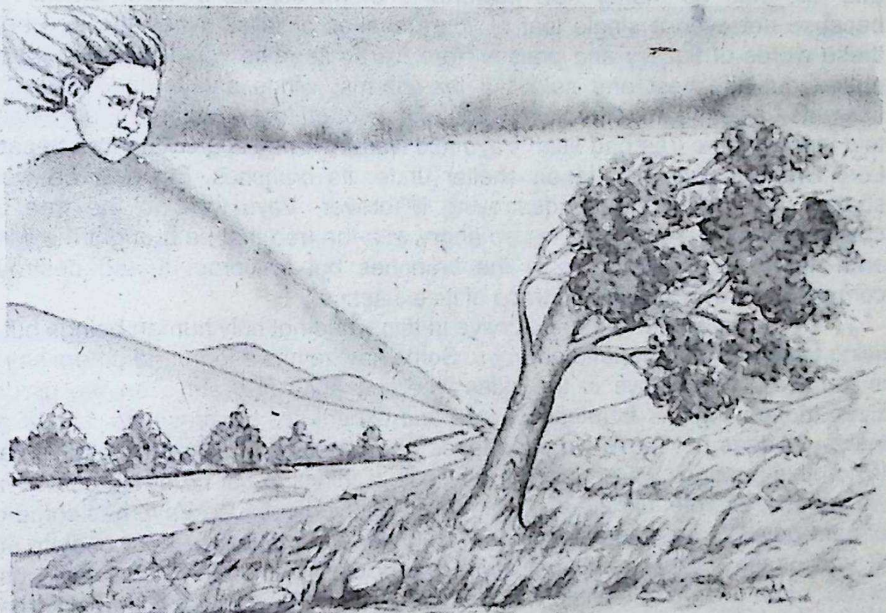
One day when a mother *Nag* was away from her home a farmer accidently killed three of her babies while digging his fields. When the mother *Nag* came back and saw her dead babies she was furious. She went to the farmer's house and killed him, his wife and his two sons and was looking around to see if there was anyone else. She saw the young daughter of the farmer hiding in a corner with fright. When the farmer's daughter saw the *Nag* and the anger in its eyes she started trembling with fright. In her nervousness she accidentally spilt a bowl of milk in front of the mother *Nag.* Her eyes fell on the milk, and she started drinking it. She was so happy with the farmer's daughter that she asked her to ask for anything. The farmer's daughter asked the mother *Nag* to restore the life of her father, mother and brother's. The mother *Nag* said "Let it be so."
All the family members of the girl came back to life. From that day onwards the practice of worshipping *Nags* on *Nag Panchami* began. If a person is affected by the evil eye of a *Nag*, feed milk and other items they will get relief.

The moral and philosophical aspect of worshipping Nag is that we human beings are assisted by so many things to make our life smooth and successful. We as the most rational of all living beings should always be grateful to those who help us to travel the journey of life. Just as we are grateful to the *Nag,* we should also be grateful to our ancestors, parents, teachers and the founding father of our clan. Then only we can say we are good human beings. It is the moral and spiritual duty of everyone to be grateful to those who help them. In our daily activities we intermingle with so many different people. We show courtesy and respect to them by behaving in a kind and gentle manner which are wonderful human qualities. A person who does not have these qualities cannot mix with other people and will eventually be isolated by everyone. A person without a good moral character cannot be a part of society. That is why we should always be helpful and cheerful to enable us to interact with people in the journey of life. People should enjoy each other's company because this is the joy of being a human. We should be good to everyone we associate with. With these qualities, we are on the way to perfection and are respected as a godly person. Showing respect and gratitude to people with whom we interact signifies respect and show gratitude to the *Nag.* The *Nag* does not only give us the water of life and protects us from our enemies but also keeps our environment clean and healthy.

Vayu or the breath of life

Vayu or air is one of the five elements that cover the entire world and nothing can survive without it. All living beings are constantly breathing it every second of their lives. Its importance has been accepted right from the Vedic period. According to Hindu scriptures *Vayu* originated from the breath of *Vishwarupa*. It is one of the most important Hindu gods, that's why Hindu Sages gave it a human form. He is a young man with dark complexion and his vehicle is either a deer or lion. In his right hand he holds a flag and in the left a long staff. He wears white clothes and is always in hurry and panting for breath. That's why his eyes are red all the time. He is so important to the Hindus that one of the strands of the cotton chord they wear around their neck represents him.

Sometimes *Vayu* can be seen with four hands. He is one of the guardians of the ten directions and guards the North West. His palace is known as *Gandhawati*. His two famous sons are *Bhimsen* and *Hanuman*. It is believed that Agni is also one of his sons because during the Vedic period the Rishis used to rub two pieces of wood to make fire. The friction the wood created air which is the breath of life of for the fire. Scholars of Hinduism say we have ten different kinds of air inside our body and they must be kept in balance if we want to be healthy. Five of them are called Pran (life) and five are called Vayu (air).



The five *Prans* or life are *Pran, Apan, Saman, Udan,and Vyan*. Of these Pran (life) is the most important one as it controls the other nine airs. When our lungs draw *Pran*" we breathe in and the lungs distribute this *Pran* to different parts of the body. It is this distributed *Pran* that helps us in digesting food; excrete stool, urine and other waste matters from the body.

The *Vayu's* (air) are Nag, *Kurma, Krikla, Devdutta* and *Dhananjaya.* It is these *Vayus* that help us to move the different parts of our body. Like our hands to hold and our legs to walk. That is why it is our life and we cannot live without it. We can live without eating for a few days, but cannot live without *Vayu.* Hindus believe Lord Shiva lives on the tip of *Pran*. Hindus believe if we can control air we breathe in we can see our formless soul which resides in us. It is believed that Rishis and Sages of the past could control their breath and see their inner self and recognize who they were. *Vayu* is so powerful that nothing can move or exist without it. There are many myths and stories regarding the importance of *Vayu*, but the most interesting one is of the cotton tree and *Vayu.*

Once there was a huge lustrous cotton tree, which was so magnificent that it could be seen from miles away. Many kinds of birds made their nests in its branches. No matter how powerful the winds, storms and tornadoes were they could not even shake a single leaf off the tree. Everything around it would be blown away but no storm ever affected the cotton tree. One day the priest of the gods *Narad* came to the tree and praised it. He said "You are so mighty, strong and tall, that, no matter how powerful a storm comes, it never affects you, because not even a single leaf of yours shakes or falls." When the tree heard these words of flattery and praises from *Narad* its mind was filled with pride. It puffed out its chest and said "All the storms, winds and tornadoes are my servants." After hearing the vain words of the cotton tree *Narad* went to *Vayu* and told him what the tree had said. *Vayu* told *Narad* he had spared the tree because Lord Brahma once had taken shelter under its branches. But now he would shatter the trees pride by destroying it forever. *Vayu* went to the tree and challenged it for a duel. He was so angry with the tree that he brought the winds and storms to break not only the branches but to uproot it and destroy it completely forever leaving no trace of its existence.

That is why to live and survive in this world not only human beings but all living things have to depend on *Vayu.* Some say he has a form and others say he is formless. *Vayu* stays in the skies whereas Agni (fire) stays on the ground. Even though *Vayu* is formless we see and experience his presence. Like if gas inside us does not move we experience uneasiness and sometimes even pain. When this happens we eat and do all kinds of things to get rid of the gas. When we sneeze, excrete, urinate etc., we feel so relieved because *Vayu* has come out of our body. We need to balance heat, cold and other humors in our body to stay fit and healthy. When Mother Nature brings us into the world she gives us a breath of air to enjoy life. When she takes us away from the world she takes back that breath of air. Scholars of Hindu scriptures say we have ten *Vayus* inside our bodies, which must be kept in balance to stay healthy. The effect of *Vayu* in our bodies is so powerful that we can produce nectar and to get to this stage we need a competent guru who can guide us.

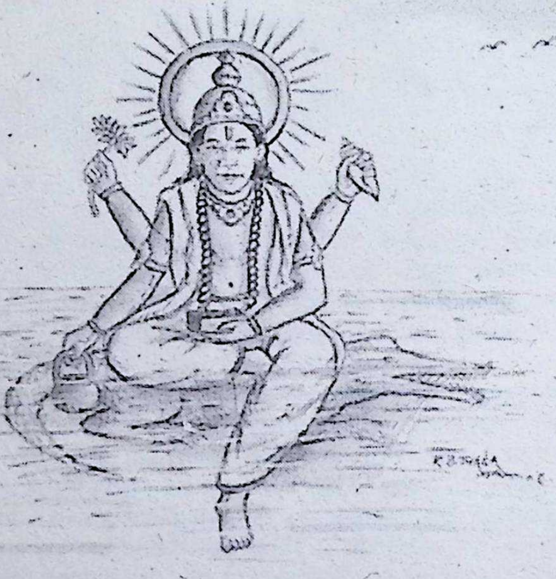
The Philosophical aspect of *Vayu* is that it teaches us to be active and productive. Just like *Vayu* we should be on the move. If Vayu does not move and sits still for a moment, everything in the world will perish and the process of creation will stop. Every part of our body moves because *Vayu* is on the move. We should realize laziness and inaction are dark sides of life. We should always be busy and hard working if we want to achieve good health and success.

The practical aspect of *Vayu* is that the pure air which Mother Nature has given to this beautiful world is being polluted today. The day is not far away when air will be so polluted that not only human beings but all living things will be wiped out from the world, because of the lack of pure air. The *Rishis* and *Munis* probably knew thousands of years ago that as time passed the air would be polluted. That is probably why Hinduism gave *Vayu* a godly form, so that human beings would respect and keep it clean.

Varun: The Water of life

Varun is one also the thirty three million gods and goddesses of Hinduism. Today just as we address *Brahma*, Vishnu and Shiva as the trio Gods, during the Vedic period Indra, Agni and *Varun* were the trio Gods. He is also addressed as *Vhu* which means one who covers and nourishes. He is directly connected to the sky which changes seasons according to changes in atmospheric pressure and nourishes the world by giving water. Among the five elements that cover the universe *Varun* represents water. He is one of the ten guardians of the universe and guards the western part of the universe.

He is one of the twelve sons of *Kashyap* and *Aditi* and plays a very important role in the lives of human beings. That is why he is worshipped as god and given a human form. The River *Ganga* flows from his right side and the *Yamuna* from his left. He has four hands which hold a lotus flower, conch shell a water jar and a jewel box. As he is the ruler of the oceans he is decked in all kinds of jewelry because the oceans are filled with them. He lives in the middle of the ocean and his kingdom is called *Shradhawati.* As king of the waters he controls all the seasons. All the waters of the streams, ponds, rivers and the seas go to meet him. *Varun* not only makes the soil soft but also sends rain from time to time for the production of agricultural crops. Water plays an important role for all livings things and nothing can survive without it. In some countries when there is drought people go to the mountaintops to pray to him for water. He is so important to the Hindus that one of the strands of the cotton cord they wear



around their neck represents him. In the *Padma Puran* there is an interesting story about *Varun.*

Once *Rawan*, the ruler of Lanka was taking a Shiva *Linga* from Mt. *Kailash* to his kingdom, the gods saw him. They were filled with terror because if he succeeded then he would be the ruler of the three worlds. Seeing this danger, all the gods gathered together and discussed how to prevent him from succeeding in his mission. While they were discussing this matter they suddenly remembered, how at the time of granting the boon, Lord Shiva had told *Rawan* that he could not lay down the *Linga* anywhere while he was taking it to Lanka. They decided to go to *Varun* and ask him to intervene on their behalf. After listening to the pleas of the gods and seeing their plight he agreed to help them.

While *Rawan* was carrying the *Linga* and heading towards his kingdom *Varun* entered his stomach. Suddenly, *Rawan* felt an urge to urinate. He looked around to see if he could ask someone to hold the *Linga* while he urinated. But he saw no one and his urge to urinate was so unbearable that he was bathing in sweat. He could not hold the *Linga* and urinate as this would be defiling it. The urge became so unbearable that for the last time he looked around to see if he could find someone to hold it. To his great relief, he saw an elderly Brahman heading towards him. He hurriedly called out to him and begged him to hold the *Linga*, for a few moments. The Brahman told him he was in a hurry and could not help. Rawan begged and pleaded with him and promised to reward him handsomely if he held it for a few minutes. He finally agreed and *Rawan* quickly gave the *Linga* to him and ran to urinate. The old Brahman was none other than *Varun* the king of the waters. According to his promise *Varun* held the *Linga* for a few moments and threw it on the ground.

After *Rawan* had finished urinating he breathed a sigh of relief and quickly ran back to the Brahman. To his surprise, he did not see him but saw the *Linga* lying on the ground. Today the place, where the *Linga* was thrown is known as *Vaidnath Dham* or Baba *Dham.* Every year before the rainy season millions of pilgrims visit this place. There is a stream flowing near the *Dham* which people say is the source of *Rawans* urine. Pilgrims bathe in this stream but do not drink its waters. The Hindu sages knew the importance of water for all living beings and nothing can survive without it. That is why they gave him a godly position in their lives. Today according to modern science about seventy percent of the human body consists of water. It monitors nutrients and hormones flowing to different parts of the body. Scientists say, the human brain consists of more than fifteen billion powerful cells out of which seventy five percent is water. Water flushes salts and toxins out of our body. When we are thirsty we should drink water otherwise the cells in our body will shrivel up and we will become sick. While urinating, we should always watch the color of our urine. If it is red or yellow it means we do not have enough water in our body and should immediately drink it to make our urine transparent.

Right from the time a baby is born some drops of water is placed on its tongue to moisten the mouth. After that the child depends on it for the rest of its life. If by chance we are polluted we use water to purify ourselves. It is so important to us that before we breathe our last to depart from this world a little of it is put in our mouth to help us bid farewell to the world. In Sanskrit it is said, "Life is water and all living things depend on it."

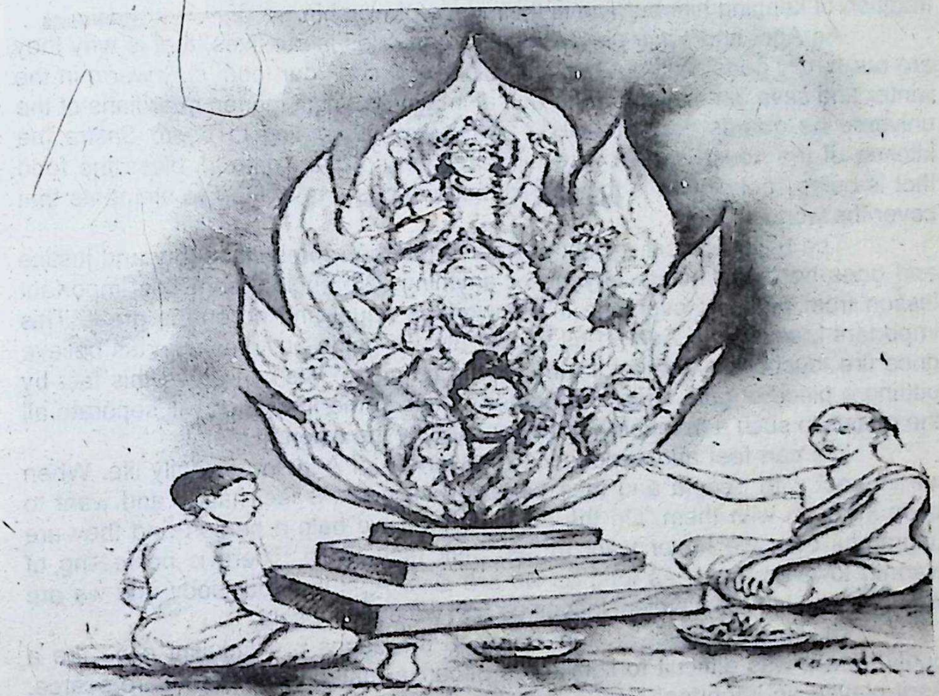
In the Vedic custom of worship a *Kalash* or a jar filled with water is first worshipped. Because it is believed the *Kalash* draws Brahma, the Vedas and the waters of the seven oceans inside it.

The philosophical aspect of *Varun* is Hindus treat and respect all things that help them in their journey of life as gods. They respect water because it represents purity and cleans the whole world and nourishes it. All living things from human beings, trees, plants and animals need water for survival. It is so important; yet, it is being polluted everywhere in the world by everyone. What a sad and shameful state. Clean water is life which means vigor and health. Dirty water is disease and death. That is why we should try to live a life without any pollutants just like pure clean water. We should try to avoid bad habits, manners and other vices, which pollute and make us shameful. We should learn from *Varun* to adapt our lives to seek a pollution free environment just as pure water. Hindu philosophers and sages knew thousands of years ago that a day would come when all streams, rivers and other sources of water would be polluted. It would be so polluted that all living things would be affected and lose their very existence. That is why the seers of Hinduism gave it a godly aspect to be respected. What the sages knew thousands of years ago supersedes knowledge and technology that science has developed today. For neither science nor technology has been able to keep the waters clean from pollution but they themselves are polluting this precious gift.

Agni: The Platform of the Gods

The Hindus before starting any sacrament or ritual have to appease Agni the god of fire, because he is the mediator between the gods and humans. The ritual to appease Agni is called *Yagya* and is done by lighting a fire on a raised platform. When *Yagya* is conducted we are inviting all the gods and goddesses who reside in Agni to be present to witness the ceremony whether it is the birth of a child, *Vrata Vanda*, or marriage. Priests offer barley, sesame seeds, and (ghee) refined butter to keep the fire burning. As Agni plays an important role in a Hindus life one of the strands of the cotton cord they wear around their neck represents him. He is so important to them that after they die they need him to consume their body to purify it so that they can enter the realm of their ancestors.

Rishis during the Vedic period started the practice of first worshipping Agni before any other god. During this period *Rishis* rubbed two pieces of wood from the *Arṇi* tree to light a fire. One of the two pieces of wood represented a male and the other female. Agni does not only mean fire but also represents light, heat and energy.



Agni has ten different forms. Five are his natural forms and five are his religious forms. His five natural forms are fire that burns in our homes, lightening in the sky, day light sun, fire which digests the food we eat and the power which takes us from one cycle of the world to another. Its five religious forms are the *Hom* (or the *Yagya* fire,) *Vrata Vanda* fire, the fire that burns in our homes, the fire of the south, and the cremation fire.

Agni was such an important god during the Vedic period that he was given a human form. His father is Heaven; earth mother and his younger brothers are Surya and *Indra*. He is described in many forms but is generally believed to be red in complexion, has two heads, two hands, black eyes, big bushy eyebrows and black hair. His most prominent characteristic is his pride that never spares anything that comes his way and treats everyone equally so much so that he does not even spare his own parents. Though immortal he seeks help of human beings for survival by entering their homes as a guest. His vehicle is a Billy goat and his two hands carry a ladle and a spatula. Agni's fire creates love and his anger destroys everything and makes room for new creation. In ancient times, he was such an important god that it was a tradition to keep him burning in the homes and temples. People of the Parsee faith even today follow this tradition of keeping him burning in their place of worship.

As Agni and *Vayu* play very important roles in our lives, that is why they are our family gods. Without his help we cannot cook our food, stay warm in the winter and save our lives from the wild animals. Amongst the ten guardians of the universe he guards the southeast. That is why according to *Vastu Sastra* the kitchen of the house should face this direction so that Agni can bless the food that is being cooked. He is the day light sun and is one of the five elements that cover the world.

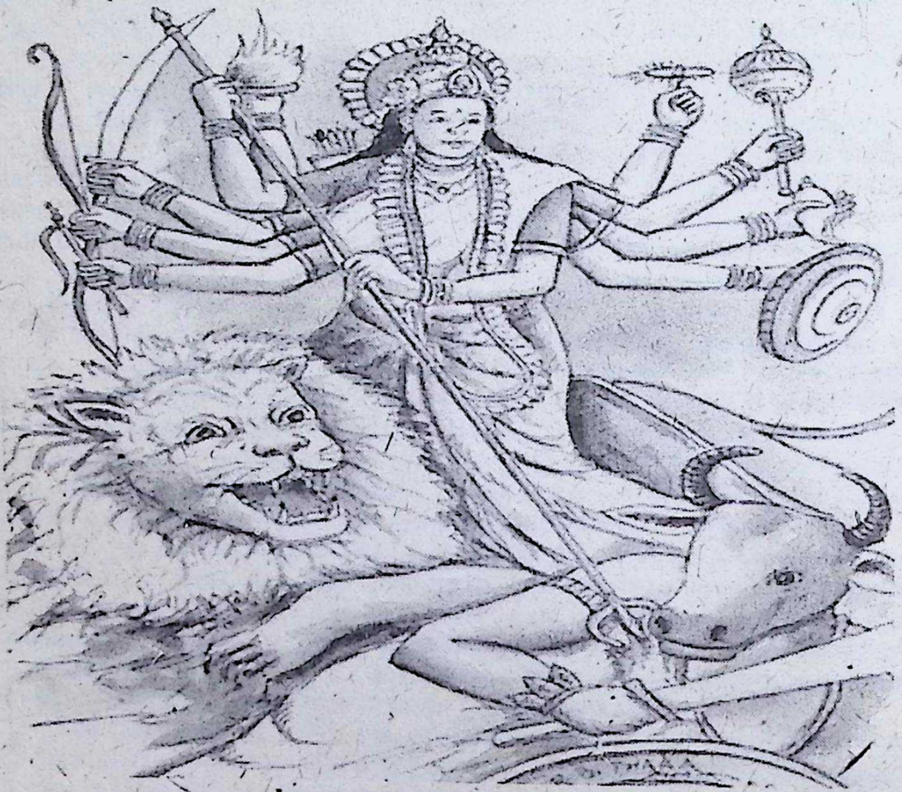
The philosophical aspect of Agni is that he represents purity and justice and does not discriminate anyone or anything. We should learn this important lesson from him that everyone in the world is equal and no one is great. This important message of Agni to us should always guide our lives. Hindus believe once fire touches something it turns pure and clean. We can prove this fact by putting a piece of gold mixed with other metals in the fire which will separate all the metals in such a manner that we can identify the different metals.

We can feel and experience the warmth of Agni in our daily life. When we interact with people and their behavior is good we feel happy and want to keep in touch with them. On the other hand, if we help a person and they are ungrateful then we never want to see their face again. There is no feeling of warmth towards them. As long as we are alive Agni is in our body and we are warm but the minute we die it leaves us and we become cold.

The moral aspect of Agni is, when the sages of Hinduism gave fire a godly form it was difficult to light a fire because materials needed were scarce. As it played an important role in their lives they treated it with respect because they knew if it got out of control it would destroy everything. That is why the wise seers of Hinduism gave it a godly form so that we would honor and respect it. Today even a child can make fire because of its easy availability. Hindu philosophy dictates that they should treat Agni as god by respecting it and not misusing it otherwise it will destroy them.

Durga: The Destroyer of Evils:

Hindus, throughout the year, celebrate one festival or another but the longest and most popular is *Durga Puja*. This festival is enthusiastically celebrated for ten days in honor of Goddess *Durga*. She is also known as *Maheshmardani* because she killed *Maheshsasu*r, the demon in the form of Mahesh or water buffalo. *Maheshsasur* was a sincere devotee of Lord *Brahmma and* his devotion pleased *Brahmma* so much that he told him to ask for a boon. *Maheshsasur* asked for the boon that no god could ever kill him. After getting the boon he started attacking the gods and they ran away from their homes to hide in the jungles and caves. His reign of terror became so unbearable that the gods gathered together and prayed for deliverance. Their prayers brought Lord Shiva, Vishnu and the other gods together and through their joint energy created a most beautiful divine goddess and she was called *Durga*.



All the gods gave their special energies and weapons to goddess *Durga* and asked her to save them from *Maheshsasur*. After hearing their pleas she challenged *Maheshsasur* in battle. The minute *Maheshsasur* saw goddess *Durga* he fell in love with her and asked her to marry him. He told her he possessed all the great and wonderful things of the three worlds and she would be lucky to be his wife. She told him she would marry him if he could defeat her in battle." *Maheshsasur* was so blinded by her beauty that he accepted her challenge. A fierce battle began between them. As the battle raged *Maheshsasur* realized he could not defeat the goddess so he started changing himself into many different forms. But *Durga* eventually killed him in his *Maheshsasur* form. In his admiration of *Durga*, *Maheshsasur* forgot that she was a goddess and the boon given to him by *Brahmma* was that no god could kill him. After killing *Maheshsasur*, *Durga* also killed his two general brothers *Sumbh* and *Nisumbh*. She killed them because they were gazing at her with evil intent. To celebrate *Durga's* victory over evil *Maheshsasur* Hindus started celebrating the occasion as *Durga Puja*. In some places it is celebrated as Kali *Puja*. There are many verses praising *Durga* but the most popular one is the following.

Durgay devi samagcha nishtha devaganda: Saha:
Balim pujam Grihandatwamastave: Shaktive:

This means: Oh! Goddess *Durga*, please come with all your retinue and accept our prayers and sacrifices. This verse is chanted while offering her a sacrifice.

The festival of *Durga Puja* is celebrated after harvesting the rice crop and putting it in the granaries. In the past to please Durga a portion of the harvested crop and the blood of the devotee were offered to her in gratitude for the abundant harvest.

The philosophical aspect of celebrating *Durga Puja*, in the past, was to replenish the soil. They believed due to extensive farming the fertility of the soil was weakened so to re-nourish it people offered their own blood. But these days instead of offering their own blood they are offering the blood of innocent birds and animals in the temples. In the past it was also a practice after a daughter got married and went to live with her husband her parents would rear a goat or rooster so that when she came back to live with them after childbirth they would sacrifice the reared goat or rooster to feed her. This was done to nourish her to regain her health and strength from the labors of childbirth and the hard work in her husband's house. *Durga Puja* is also celebrated because family members who have been separated come back home for the festival to get the *Puja Tika* and blessings from their parents and elders.

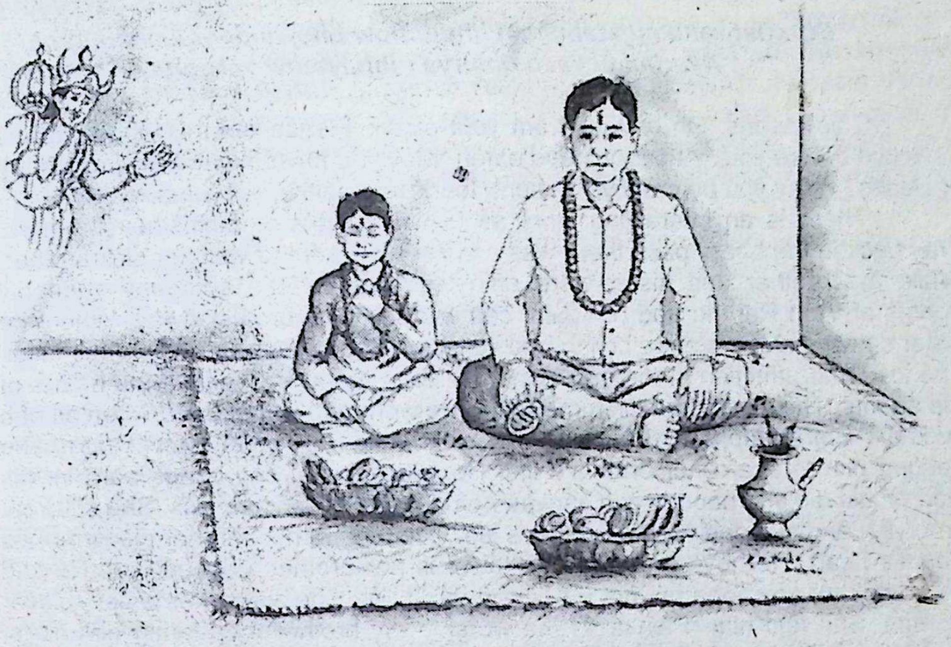
Hindu religious texts describe how the gods were easy going and relaxed. They spend their time wining and dining not doing or caring for anything. They are filled with pride and think no one can harm them. They were lethargic where as the demons are active, creative and progressive. The demons do all kinds of penances and austerities to please the three powerful gods *Brahmma*, Vishnu and Shiva to win boons. As the lesser gods are the main enemies of the demons the boons they ask from the three gods are to defeat the lesser gods. When they get the boons they start fighting with the gods and defeat them. After defeating them the demons chase them away from their homes. When the lesser gods start facing all kinds of problems and fear for their lives they go to goddess Durga and beg her to save them. After hearing their pleas the goddess rescues them from the demons.

The practical aspect of *Durga Puja* is that demons are filled with all kinds of bad elements whether it is disease, natural calamities or other evils. If we are not careful there is no escape from them. These calamities keep on coming year after year. To escape from them we must be mentally, physically, and spiritually prepared. That is why we must be like goddess *Durga,* who stands for power and strength to fight the enemies. The evils whether it is *Maheshsasur* or any other element generally attack us during the rainy season or in the hot summer. That is why at the end of each rainy season Hindus celebrate the festival of Durga Puja. They also worship the goddesses *Maha* Kali, *Maha Laxmi,* and *Maha Saraswati* for strength, prosperity and knowledge. *Durga* represents anger, cruelty and revenge, whereas *Laxmi* represents love, peace and mercy. A person who is kind and loving is often taken for granted. Just like *Maheshsasur* who looked at the beautiful, kind and loving face of *Durga* and tried to take advantage of her. She could not tolerate his behavior so she showed him her terrible form and killed him. What this shows is that even goddesses have human characteristics, such as kindness, love, anger and vengeance.

The moral aspect of Goddess *Durga* is that *Maheshsasur* represents the evil pride inside all human beings. If left uncontrolled, human beings will behave just like demons. *Tantrik* scholars say through the practice of *Tantra,* all energies can be brought under control by godly power. With its help we can destroy the evil pride of *Maheshsasur* in us. In *Tantra,* this is called the path of enlightenment.

Bhai Tika: Sisters affection for brothers

Once a year, in the month of October November on an auspicious day Hindu sisters worship their brothers for their health, wealth and happiness. In some communities, it is called *Bhaitika* and some call it *Rakchya Bandan.* Among the many Hindu festivities this is also a very important one. *Bhaitika* is celebrated on the fifth day of the festival of lights or *Deepawali and Rakchya Bandan is celebrated* sometime in July. Sisters prepare all kinds of food their brothers like to eat with their own hands and personally serve them to their brothers. A few days before the celebration the brothers and sisters agree to meet in a common place to hold the ceremony.



The celebration takes place with much happiness and fanfare. The brothers and sisters tease one another by reminding each other on how they used to behave when they were young. They laugh and giggle when they recollect those innocent moments of childhood. The celebrations are not only limited to brothers and sisters but also to other members of the family. Everyone sings and dance to the sound of music.

After the sisters have finished worshipping their brothers, the brothers also worship their sisters. After that the sisters serve their brothers food they had cooked that their brothers like to eat. While the brothers are eating they also feed their sisters. After the brothers and sisters have enjoyed each other's company the brothers present their sisters with various kinds of gifts like money, clothing and jewelry. They present these gifs to their sisters with love and respect. All ethnic groups of the Hindu society celebrate brother-worship according to their customs and traditions. There is no hard and fast rule as to how it should be celebrated.

In some communities the sisters tie colorful chords around their brother's right wrist called *Rakchya Bandan* or safety shield and wish them good health, peace and prosperity. Brother worship is celebrated in such grand manner that even those sisters who do not have one make a brother right from their childhood. In this way they also celebrate the festival. In some communities sisters chant the following verse while worshipping and blessing their brothers.

Bhratistwaha nujatahaham bhunchow bhojaymedham subham:
Ayurlaxmi yaso dhairya nibhayatuwamrogita:

This means: Oh brother I am your sister. Please eat the foods which I have laid before you. After you have eaten "May you have a long life, earn plenty of wealth." "May you be creative, patient, fearless, healthy, witty and wise?"

There is an interesting story as to why sisters worship their brothers. Way back in the hoary past, there was a sister who went to visit her sick brother. While the brother and sister were enjoying each other's company suddenly agents of Yam Raj the god of death, came to take the brother away. When the sister saw them she started crying and wailing at them to spare her brother's life. The love and affection of the sister and her sobs and wail's melted the hearts of the agents. They were in a dilemma and were wondering what to do when all of a sudden *Yamraj* happened to come that way. When the sister saw *Yamraj* she begged him to spare her brother's life. He told her all living things born in this world must die and nobody can escape from it and he was helpless. She still kept on crying and pleaded for her brother's life. Seeing and hearing her pleas melted *Yama's* heart. Her love and affection towards her brother pleased him. He told her to ask for any boon but not for her brother's life. The sister was a very clever woman. She told him "Please let me worship my brother by offering him fruits, flowers and different foods he likes to eat. After that I will massage his head with oil and put a garland around his neck made of silk flowers. She told him he could take her brother away after the oil on his head and the silk flower garland around his neck had dried. *Yamraj* was surprised and happy that the sister had not asked for a complicated boon, He said "Let it be so" and went way.

Yama's agents came many times throughout the year to take away the brother but returned empty handed. He was surprised to see his agents come back empty handed every time they went to take the brother. So he decided to go personally and find out for himself what the reason was. When he reached the brother's place he was shocked to see that not only the oil on the brother's head had not dried but even the silk flower garland looked fresh. He was so pleased with the sister's love towards her brother that he took a vow saying, "No one born in the world is immortal. But I promise no brother or sister will be separated from each other on brother's day." Since then every year on this day sisters have been worshipping their brothers.

The philosophical aspect of brother worship is that it unites family members at least once a year and gives an opportunity to a married sister to meet her brother and parents. This ceremony not only unites and strengthens brothers and sisters but also their children and other family members. It gives family members an opportunity to share their joys and sorrows. This festival of the Hindus is very unique and is not found in any other culture because in most societies after a daughter gets married there is no compulsion for her to meet her brother and parent's. In many societies daughters get married and hardly ever see their brothers or parents. Hindu family members may be separated all over the world and place but they must come together to celebrate this important ceremony. There is always a hidden reason in Hinduism to celebrate various sacraments and ceremonies. For people to live in a society they must be sociable and be a part and parcel of the community or else they will be left out to be alone. Celebrating these festivals and sacraments is not only to be with family members but also to be a part of the society.

The practical aspect of brother worship is that sisters who have been married and living with their husbands look forward to unite with their brothers on this day. This day not only unites brothers and sisters but also brings together brother in-laws, nieces, nephews, cousins and other family members. In this way it unites family members, who have been separated for a long time. That is why brother worship should be given continuity because it brings brothers and sisters together and unites other family members in an atmosphere filled with peace, joy and happiness.

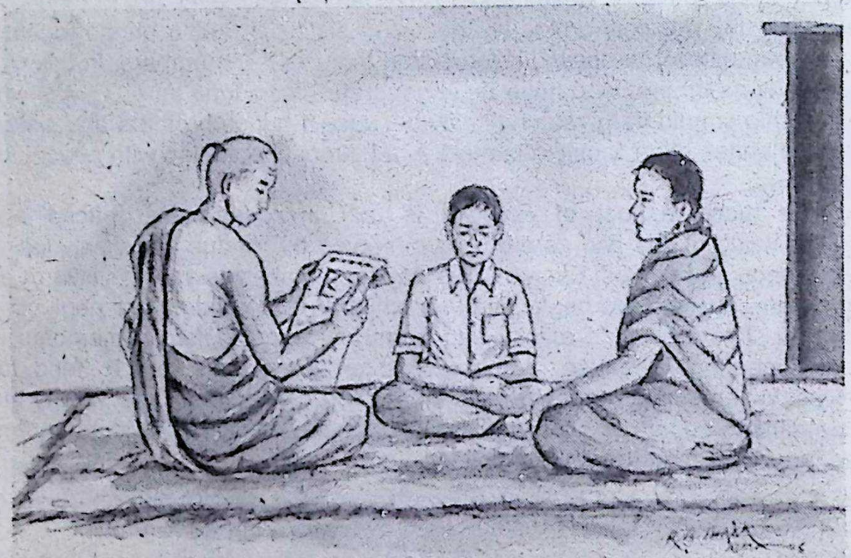
The moral aspect of *Bhaitika* is that in today's fast paced and materialistic world rituals and ceremonies observed by Hindus are slowly losing their importance and values. Everyone is busy for themselves and has little or no time for others. Parents are neglecting their children and children are neglecting their parents. The feeling of affinity and harmony amongst family members is slowly disappearing. Because of this everyone these days has to fend for themselves. When someone needs help there is no one around. That is why the intangible cultural heritage of Hinduism should be preserved and promoted because they keep family members united.

Chena: Horoscope knows it all

After a child is born in a Hindu family one of the family members informs the family astrologer. The astrologer consults his astrological chart and makes a horoscope based on the year, month, day and time of the child's birth. Hindus believe if a professional astrologer has made the horoscope of a person accurately it will guide their journey of life to be perfect and successful. A person who consult such a astrologer and take their advice will never have problems. The following Sanskrit verse describes the importance of a horoscope.

Apratyachyam ch vivado yatra kewal:
Pratyachyam Jyotisham Shastra Chandakau Yatra Sacheandaun:

This means: Questions can be raised about the credibility of the scriptures because they have no witness to what is written in them. But no questions can be raised on the astrological scriptures because the sun, moon and the other planets are its witnesses. That is why a person should have a horoscope so that he can know the good and bad moments he may have to face and be prepared.



When we are born in the world we know nothing about life it but as we grow we slowly learn to live in a society. Likewise, a horoscope teaches us to live in the world surrounded by good and evil forces based on the rotations of the planets. Our deeds and actions move according to their position. People may laugh at us because they do not know the importance of a horoscope. We can prove the importance of a horoscope by just showing the example of a tiny little ant that bites us. After it has bitten us we are panic stricken and look all over our body to find the ant so that it will not bite again. If a tiny little ants bite can scare us so much just imagine what would happen if a planet weighing millions of tons is not in our favor? People may scoff at the idea, how planets which are millions of miles away can affect us. They forget that it is because of the changes in the position of the planets that the seasons change and rule our destinies. The position of the planets in the winter forces us to wear warm clothes and we can also eat a lot of food without having any problems. While in the summer we wear light clothes and eat less food because we cannot digest it properly. Likewise, in the spring season new plants start growing and the rainy season nourishes them. Similarly, it is the change in the seasons that ripens the wheat, rice and other crops that we harvest. We can also experience the affect of the planets during the solar eclipse. The sun is shining brightly and everything is moving normally. But the moment the eclipse begins and it starts getting dark all movements slowly come to a standstill. And the moment the eclipse passes and the sun begins to shine everything comes back to normal again. If this is not the game of the planets than what is?

Who brought about these changes in the world? Is it God, man or Mother Nature? The ups and downs of our lives are also determined by the planets. So it is very important that we show our horoscope regularly to a professional astrologer so that he can advice us about the coming events. It would really be wonderful if a person could make and read his own horoscope then they would not have to gamble on getting a professional astrologer.

The Hindu philosophers knew the importance of horoscopes, that is why they laid emphasis that everyone should have one. In a Hindu's life no ritual, sacrament and activity can begin without consulting the horoscope. No journey, no construction, no animals should be bought and so on. The seers of Hinduism gave importance to the horoscope because they knew the problems a person would have to face if rituals and sacraments were held without consulting it. The scholars of astrology say the movements of the planets not only affect the world but also the human body. According to them the effects of planets on our physical body are as follows. The Sun (Surya) bestows bravery, Moon (*Chandra*) affects our heart, and Mars (Mangal) gives strength, Mercury (Budh) increases wisdom, Jupiter (*Vrihaspati*) increases knowledge, Venus (*Sukra*) beautifies and Saturn (*Sani*) makes us worried.

A professional astrologer can find out through mathematical calculations the speed, movements and position of the planets. After he looks at our horoscope he will consult his astrological chart and calculate the position of the planets. Then he will advise us on how to face the coming events. Amongst the astrologers, there is a saying, if the planets favor a person a pauper can become a ruler and if they don't then a ruler can become a pauper.

The philosophical aspect of a horoscope is that it is our guide in the journey of life. A professional astrologer will give us good advice which we should follow so that we may overcome any challenges and become successful in life.

The practical and moral aspect of not having a horoscope or consulting an expert astrologer can be seen these days. All the turmoil the world is going through like broken homes, businesses failures, political unrest and so on. This is because no astrologer was consulted. In the case of marriages a couple gets married by just looking at each other's physical appearances and other qualities that they like of each other. After living together they find out that one likes hot spicy foods while the other does not. One snores while the other is a light sleeper. Likewise one wants sex every night while the other is not interested. One is serious in nature while the other is happy go lucky.

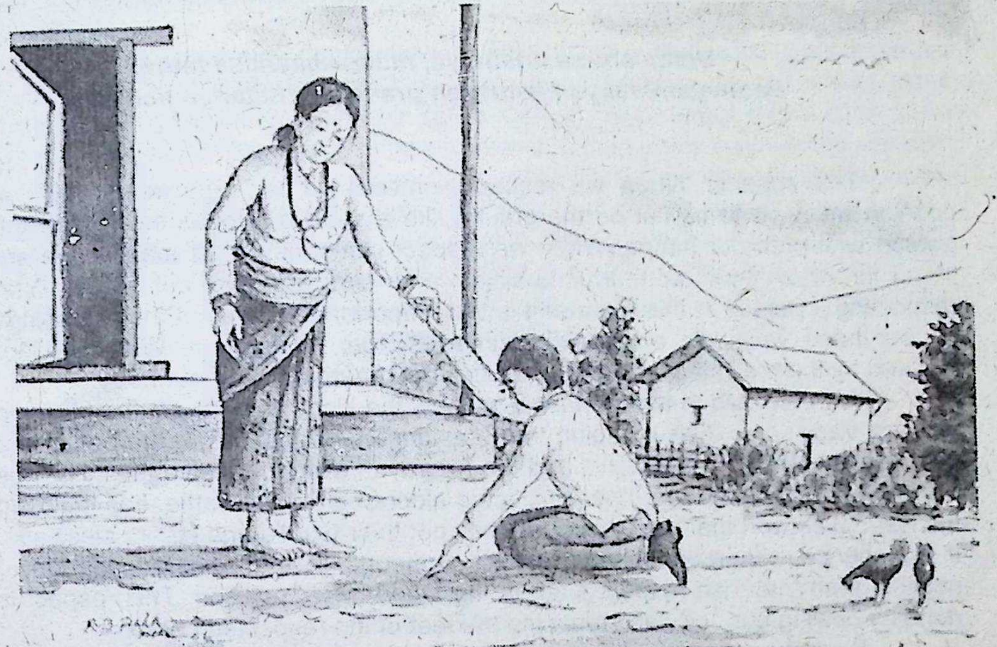
These differences bring about quarrels and fights between couples. They try to adjust but cannot and by the time they get divorced they have children who see them constantly fighting with each other. This couple has not only ruined their lives but also the lives of their innocent children. Entering into sacred marriage without consulting a professional astrologer who would have advised them on their compatibility can be risky. It is believed a good astrologer after consulting a horoscope knows everything about the person better than they know themselves. That is why, in the past, people did not show their horoscope to just any ordinary astrologer but only those whom they trusted and that too on certain days of the week. Because of the importance of horoscope, Hinduism lays great emphasis on consulting it before doing or starting any enterprise whether personal or otherwise to see if the planets are in their favor. That is why it is important to make an accurate horoscope for our children and teach them to regularly consult a good astrologer.

These days it is very difficult to find a good astrologer who can either prepare an accurate horoscope or give expert advice. Instead of giving true and real facts they flatter us and try to please us. They do not help but advise us to do wrong which might ruin us. We should choose a well known professional astrologer to make our horoscope as it is our guide to travel the journey of life.

Importance of Reverence:

Human beings want to live in a society where there is peace and harmony. This is only possible if the society is governed by love and respect. To respect the elders and love the young ones is the basis of a peaceful society. There are many ways to respect a person depending on their religion and society.

As soon as Hindus get up in the morning they remember their creator then they look at the palms of their hands and ask the palm not to witness any evil and worship them. Before stepping on the floor from their bed they worship the earth and remember Mother Earth Then they welcome the rising sun and worship him. And in the evening they bid it farewell at sunset. Before the day ends they have worshipped all the gods and goddesses including their family god. And before going to bed they bow to the elders and lovingly caress the young ones.



In Hinduism before any ritual or worship is started, god of fire *(Agnidevta)* has to be invoked. After that, the presiding priest and teachers are honored. Then parents are honored and respected like gods. Hindus probably are the only people in the world who have different forms and ways to honor different status of people that have to be respected. Parents are respected in one way and religious teachers in another. Elders are respected in one way, friends and youngsters in another.

The main forms of respect in Hinduism are: *Namaskar, Swasti Dhanushvat* and *Shastanga. Namaskar* is done by raising both the hands to chest level with the palms joined together followed by a gentle bow. When we do *Namaskar* to someone we are respecting their soul with our five sense and five active organs. The five sense organs are eyes, nose, tongue, ears and feeling. Likewise the five active organs are tongue, hands, feet, sound and excretory powers. Elders and guests are greeted with *Namaskar. Swasti* is done by raising the open palm of the right hand with a gentle bow and bringing it towards our forehead.

"*Shastangadandavat*" is done by a person lying flat on the ground. This kind of respect is given to the gods, parents, and religious teachers. Respecting anyone in this way means we are respecting them with the eight parts of our body like hands, head, eyes, mind, chest, word, knees and legs. According to the *Ahirka* source the following Sanskrit verse describes *Shastangadandavat* form of respect.

Ursha shirsa drishtaya, mansa bachasa tatha:
Padhvyan kravyan januvyan pranamo shatanga uchyate:

This means: When we respect someone in the *Shastangadandavat* position we have to lie flat on the ground like a stick and touch the feet of the person with both our hands. When we respect someone in this manner we are trying to draw their wonderful qualities and energies into our body. After respecting a person in this manner it is very important that we get their blessings on our head while we are raising ourselves from the ground. When we are blessed by them all their wonderful qualities and energies enter our body.

We can read in the Mahabharata how the kings went to get the blessing of Guru *Vasist* and *Vyas* by doing the *Shastangadandavat* before the battle. We can also read how the *Pandavs* and the *Kauravas* went to receive the blessings of *Bhisma Pitama* and the other respected elders before the battle. It is believed the *Pandavas* won the battle because they got their Guru's and elders blessings. If by chance a person cannot respect someone in the *Shastangadandavat* position then they can respect them in the *Dhanushvat* position. This respect is done by bowing our body and touching the feet of the respected person.

By respecting others we show humility and humbleness. Anyone who is proud and acts vainly and thinks they know everything and tries to dominate others will be discarded by the society. No one will like and care for such a person and every one will avoid them. When we respect our parents and religious teachers through *Shastangadandavat* we receive their greatest blessings for our all round progress, peace and harmony

The philosophical aspect of respect or *Samman* is, we turn our ego and pride into humility and gain positive energy. We can read in the *Ramayan* when Ram was going to live in exile for twelve years, his brother Bharat asked him for his wooden slippers *Kharau* which he took and placed on the throne. It is said, whenever Bharat faced problems and had no way out, he would humbly present his problem and ask for advice from the wooden slippers *Kharau.* If by respecting a pair of lifeless wooden slippers one can solve complex problems just imagine what we human beings could achieve if we respected and honored each other.

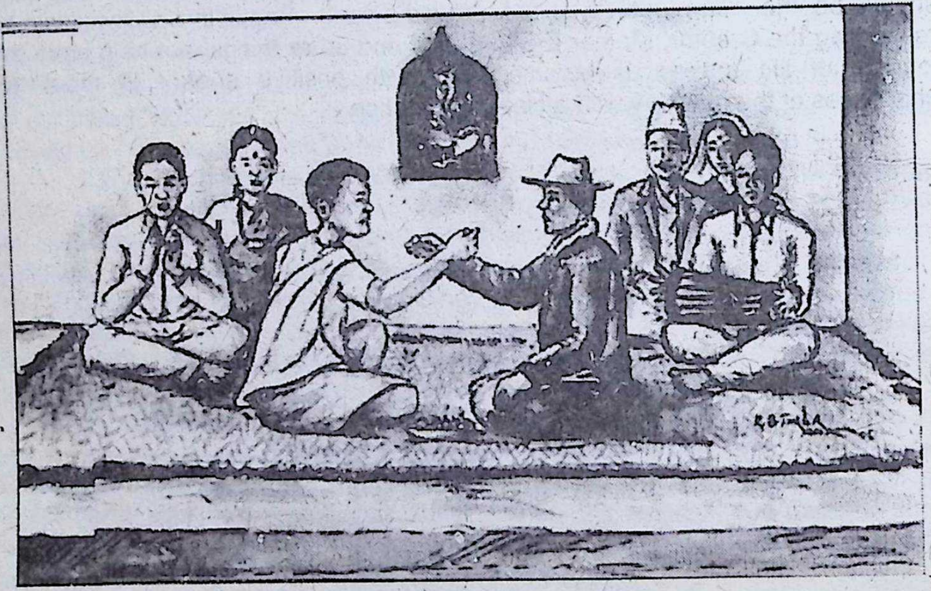
According to *Ayurved* it is believed that we human beings have nine volts of electricity inside our body. When we clasp our hands and do *Namaskar* to someone we are recharging the electric current inside our body. But nowadays the western influence of shaking hands has turned our positive energy into negative energy by compelling us hesitantly to shake hands with people we may not like. That is why our culture of doing *Namaskar* is superior to shaking hands and letting someone else's negative current enter our body which makes us feel unhappy.

In the name of modernization Hindus have discarded their inherited cultural values and traditions which have been handed down to them from thousands of years and generation to generation. They forget that it is because of these values that they have become perfect human beings. When they discard these values they are making a very big mistake because they are throwing away a precious gem for a piece of glass. Following our cultural values and traditions should be the norm until they are proved wrong. Beginning a new day by respecting the Creator, Mother Earth, elders and other things that help us in the journey of life makes us humble, filled with positive energy to meet the challenges of the new day with a clear conscience.

Soul Brothers and Sisters

The custom of two strangers becoming soul brothers and sisters in Hindu communities has been handed down since the ancient past. This wonderful custom is slowly losing its importance whether it is because of modern fast paced life style or lack in human values. As Hindu society consists of many different castes, creeds and tribes, the custom of soul brothers and sisters was a wonderful way of uniting people. Generally, when there is a difference in the life styles, religion, food and other cultural aspects there is plenty of room for quarrels and misunderstandings between people. But because of the custom of soul brothers and sisters peace and harmony prevailed in the society. And when there is peace and harmony in the society there is bound to be progress and development.

In the past it was difficult to find an individual who did not have a soul brother or soul sister. The custom of having soul brothers and sisters created a strong relationship between two absolute strangers. In-fact the relationship was so strong that it was just like biological brothers and sisters. When two strangers become soul brothers and sisters they agree to be united forever and to look after each other even if it means giving up one's life for the other. Generally, people became soul brothers or sisters if they looked alike, had similar habits and tastes. It was all the better if they had the same name.



In the past if people from different villages quarreled and fought and if they wanted peace they would choose the strongest or the most influential person of the village and make them soul brothers. The two of them would be brought to a nice quiet spot between their villages. Then the soul brother ceremony would be conducted in front of the people from both the villages as witnesses. After the ceremony was over the witnesses would sit down and enjoy a grand feast. An environment of peace and harmony was established between them. From that day onwards the villagers from both villages would proudly look upon each other as soul brothers and respect each other. If one of the villages had a problem or calamity the soul brothers village would come to the rescue.

When two individuals became soul brothers it meant that their parents, brothers and sisters, were also bound by this relationship. The parents became soul parents, brothers became soul brothers and sisters became soul sisters. The custom of becoming soul brothers became so strong and dear that if any person from another village spoke against their soul brother or their village there would be a quarrel which sometimes would end up in fights. The Hindus say "If a person has lots of children he is prosperous and wealthy but if he has a single soul son he is very lucky because he can always depend on him without a shadow of doubt." So we can imagine how important this custom was in the society. This custom is very wonderful because there is no discrimination between a rich and a poor or a high and low caste. Both of them treated each other with respect and equality. There are no social or economic barriers between them and if any misunderstandings arose they were resolved peacefully. This custom was given so much importance by the Hindus that if a soul father died and his son had also died then the soul son could perform all the death rites of the soul father and inherit all the property of the soul father and there was strong law enforcing this rule. The custom of having soul brothers was so strong and popular that even women made soul sisters.

The rituals that are performed when two strangers are going to be soul brothers or sister vary from place to place and caste to caste. In some caste, it is performed by singing and dancing and then the soul brother or sister exchange partially eaten choicest foods with each other. This eating of the shared food seals the pact of their relationship. In some caste, a religious ceremony is held after which the priest puts a Tika on their foreheads. Then he would declare them as soul brother or sister. After that he tells them to share their joys and sorrows followed by merriment. There is no hard and fast rule of when and how two strangers became soul brothers or soul sisters. Even grownups became soul brothers or sisters if they like each other. In the past, when children started going to school, it was a custom to make them have soul brothers or sisters. This relationship of theirs would bind them and make them well wishers of each other for the rest of their lives. There was no limit as to how many soul brothers or sisters a person could have. If a person migrated from the place they grew up and settled in a new place they would make new soul brothers and sisters.

The philosophy of having soul brothers or sisters is very important. We cannot choose our brothers and sisters and are compelled to accept them as our relations but soul brothers and sisters we choose ourselves. That is why parents and teachers should encourage and teach children to have soul brothers and soul sisters right from their childhood. This custom would not only unite the children but would also unite two families for the rest of their lives. It would help them not only to be better human beings but also good citizens. If this custom of the Hindus was adopted by different societies of the world there would be peace and harmony everywhere. Our ancestors established this wonderful custom that brought peace and harmony between different tribes and castes and welded them together. Instead of giving importance to this wonderful custom, we are moving away from them and imitating and coping others tastes and fashion.

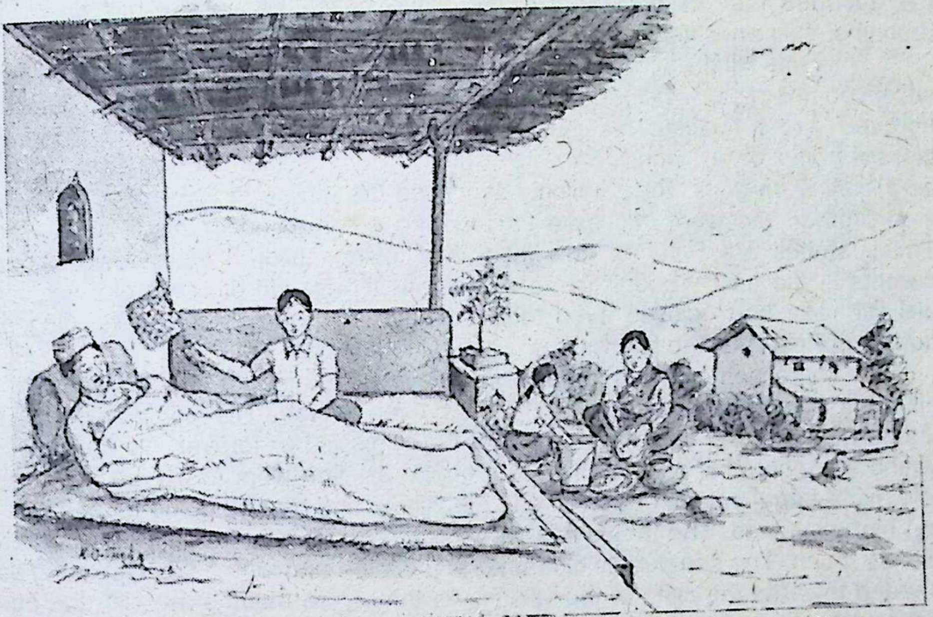
The practical and moral aspect of making soul brothers and sisters is that man is a social animal. He likes to be surrounded by friends and well wishers with whom he can share his joys and sorrows. So, if he has a lot of friends, his journey of life will be smooth and happy.

Sometimes, people who we think are our friends are actually jealous of our success and are always plotting our downfall. That is why behavior of friends is not the same all the time. So, when we make new friends we have to be careful and selective so that we make only good friends who we can trust. They should not only be our friends but also our well-wishers. Likewise, we should also be the same with them. Just having lots of friends is not good, but having a few whom we can always trust and depend upon is the best. Friends should not be fickle minded but someone we can share our joys and sorrows. That is why when we make someone a blood (soul) brother or sister the person is more than a friend. We should treat that person as our soul mate. We may be two different people but if we deceive each other it will be a very grave sin. The sanctity of becoming soul brothers or sister was so popular that even the gods had soul brothers. In the Shiva *Puran* it is written that Lord Shiva and *Kuber* were soul brothers. That is why *Kuber* is also called *Trembhakshak*, which means the friend of the three-eyed Shiva.

Children's duties

It is the moral duty of children to love, honor and respect their parents and to look after their welfare as long as they are alive. These are the greatest service children can do to their parents and there is no greater service than to serve parents. It is said that the greatest service is to serve god but has anyone till date seen gods and goddesses? People who preach religion and believe in it may have experienced god. People believe in god because he created them but and looks after their welfare and the world. If people have so much faith and love for an imaginary god and are ready to do anything for him than how much more we should be able to love and respect our parents who are our real living gods and goddesses.

Our parents not only brought us into this world but also provide us everything we need. When we are in problems and need them they never leave us but are always there. In *Manusmriti* chapter 2 verses 145 it is written how much we should honor our parents.



Upadhyayad dasacharya achranam shatam pita:
Sahsam tu mata gaurwanatirichytya:

This means the Guru that teaches us to work and worship is ten times higher than the guru that educates us. The father is a hundred times higher than the guru and the mother is a thousand times higher than the father. Again in *Manusmriti* chapter 2 verse 227 it is written.

Yan matapitraun klasam sahatesambhabe nrinam:
Na tasya niskriti sakya katum warshatairapi:

This means, even in a hundred years, children cannot pay the debt of their parents who struggled to raise them. That is why children must honor and serve their parents and guru diligently so that they will always be pleased and happy with them. Only when children can please their parents and guru, they will have peace and happiness. Many a time they worried and kept awake all night to care for us when we were sick. They never let us feel or experience any kind of scarcity. How much our parents sacrificed to raise us so that we could travel the journey of life is beyond our imagination. Human beings are social animals and are not like birds and animals that leave their parents once they grow up. Our parents remain with us till they depart from this world.

It is the duty of loving children to serve their parents all their life and provide them with everything they need. Once they depart from this world it is the children's duty to, offer *Pinda dan* in honor of them. Once this ceremony is done the departed parents restless soul will have peace because it will go to the realms of their ancestors.

In the Hindu scriptures, we can read stories about how ideal children sacrificed their self interest for the happiness of their parents. Lord *Ganesh* honored and respected his parents, Shiva and *Parwati*, by giving them the highest honor of the world. *Shrawan* Kumar honored and respected his parents as if they were gods. Ram willingly sacrificed the throne in favor of his younger step brother and went into exile for fourteen years to honor his father's word. These stories are proof of how loyal and loving children were towards their parents in the past. Though these stories are thousands of years old; yet, they are still read and enjoyed even today. Among the many stories regarding our duty to our parents, the following is the most ideal one;

There was an aged father who always complained about this and that to his son. And when he got sick it was even worse. His complains got so unbearable that the son decided to get rid of his father forever. So, he told his young son about his plan. Early one morning the son went to his old father and told him a famous healer has come to the village and he was going to take him to get him examined. The father was very excited and happy that his son cared for him so much. The son put his old father in a basket and along with his young son headed towards the cliffs of the village. As they were nearing the cliff, the aged father asked his son "I thought you were taking me to see a healer but we are heading towards the cliffs." The son told his aged father "The healer lives on the other side of the cliffs." The aged father in his innocence, believed his son. So he made himself comfortable and went to sleep. As they got to the steepest part of the cliff the son stopped and untangled the basket and was about to throw his aged father off the cliff. As he was about to throw his father his young son looked at him and said "Father, throw grandfather down the cliff but don't throw the basket." The father was surprised at what his son said and asked him "Why." The son replied "When you get old I will need that basket to carry you to this place so please save the basket."

The above story teaches us that whatever we sow, we will reap. The philosophy of life is that it is the duty of children to serve and respect their parents. They have to look after them and meet all their needs throughout their lives. Otherwise their fate could be what the aged fathers son could have been if he had thrown his father down the cliff. That is why children should make their parents feel as if they are in Heaven and receive their blessings. The blessings given by happy parents in their old age are auspicious. Children who receive these blessing will also be taken care of by their offspring's. Nobody has seen the gods and goddesses but our parents are our gods in human form. We can show our parents heaven by honoring and looking after them and all their needs. We can show them hell by not caring for them and discarding them. As we are human beings and live in a society we must learn how to live in the society from our parents, because they have already lived in it successfully. So let us be grateful and loyal to our parents by serving them as gods

The practical and moral aspect of children's duties to parents is that we should interact with our parents regularly and meet their every need. Our children are all ways watching us how we are treating their grandparents. If the grandparents are living in the house they will take care of the grandchildren and the house will be filled with love, peace and harmony. Grandparents will not only look after the grand children but will also take care of the house. Grandparents will give their grand children the same love and affection that their parents got from them and even more. There is a saying the interest a person earns on a savings account in a bank is cherished more than the principal amount deposited in the bank. This means that the grand children are dearer than their parents to the grandparents. So there are only advantages when children live with their parents. These days children leave their parents homes and stay separately on the pretext of wanting privacy and independence. What is there to hide from parents who know them better then they know themselves! Independence is not what children want? Instead it is the responsibility of looking after old parents they want to avoid and escape from. If children just stop and think of all the advantages of staying with their parents they would be wiser,

Responsibilities of parents

In every society of the world whether a person wants to get married or not is their personal choice and nobody can force them. But in Hindu society people don't have this privilege and must get married because they believe when they are born in the world they carry an ancestral debt which must be paid by them. They only way they can pay this debt is by getting married and having children to continue the family line. The other reason they must marry is that when they die their children will send their soul to the ancestral realm by performing the *Pinda Dan* ceremony. They believe human beings are social animals that have to live in a society so that they can spread their kind and are not like birds and animals whose young ones leave their parents once they have developed their wings or stopped sucking milk. So having children in a Hindu society is a very serious matter. Parents have to be aware that once they have children there are all kinds of problems and responsibilities they have to face. Once they have children no matter what the sex may be they must accept the child as a blessing of God. That is why in the *Manusmriti* Chapter 9 it is written.

Yathaiwatma Tathaputra:
Putraynd Duheta Tatha:

This means just like there is no difference between a soul and a son likewise there is no difference between a son and a daughter because they are the one and same. Both of them are equal In the eyes of God and should be accepted as a blessing.

Parents have a lot of responsibilities right from the time a child is born in terms of love, affection, food, clothing, and education and so on. Children should not be looked upon as a burden but as something precious to live for. A child is like a lump of clay in the hands of a potter who moulds and shapes it to perfection. Likewise, it is the duty of parents to raise their children in such a perfect manner that they can present it to the gods. It is also their duty to guide and teach their children to choose the correct journey of life. The duty of a father is to provide and protect the family and the duty of the mother is to raise and look after them in a loving manner. We can see in nature this kind of responsibility being shared when we see the sun ruling the day and the moon ruling the night. The home should be the first school of a child and parents should be their first teachers. If parents do not look after their children and depend on others to raise them they must ask themselves what kind of children they will grow up-to be. So it is their responsibility to make them better than themselves.

It is believed in the ancient past; parents wanted a child and made it better than them. It was so perfect that he\she could be presented to the gods. The family members looked upon a pregnant woman with pride and every month prayers and rituals were performed for the perfect development of the hands, feet, brain and various other parts of the child's body. It was also performed to make the woman feel that other members of the family loved and cared for her so that it would ease her labor pain and give safe delivery of the child. These rituals were also done so that the mother would have peace and happiness which was important for the positive development of the new infant. It is believed that whatever happens or said around a pregnant woman has great effect on her and the child she is carrying.

This can be proved from the story of *Bhakta Pralad* whose mother was carrying him when *Narad,* the priest of the gods, used to come to visit her. Every time he came he would praise god Vishnu as the true god. The result was that when *Bhakta Pralad* was born, right from his childhood, he would sing songs in praise of god Vishnu. Likewise, we can read in the *Mahabharat* how *Arjun's* wife *Subhadra* while pregnant with *Abhimanyu used* to pester him to tell her how he entered the *Chakraview* in battle and how he came out of it. One day *Arjun* was so fed up of his wife's persistence that he started narrating to her the secret. While *Arjun* was telling her the secret she fell asleep. And the result of not hearing the full story was that fourteen years later when her son *Abhimanyu* went to battle against the *Kauravas* he was killed by them. He got killed because he could not get out of the *Chakraview* as his mother *Subhadra* had fallen asleep when his father *Arjun* was explaining to her how to get out of it. A husband should love and respect his pregnant wife because she is in the process of creating his soul and descendent. Stories like these should teach us a lesson that when we are around a pregnant woman we should be careful as to what we are saying to others and her. Her surroundings should be filled with peace and harmony so that the coming child will be filled with positive energy.

In today's fast paced materialistic world with both parents being educated and working their responsibilities towards children are questionable. Before having children parents should plan ahead so that the children do not become a burden on them. They should divide their time to be with the children to avoid conflict and quarrels after they are born. A big problem these days is sometimes a wife earns more than the husband and in a male dominated society it hurts the husband's ego to make his wife work and he stay home looking after the children. If both parents work out of the house who is going to look after the baby? These days the answer is a maid or a day care center, what a pitiful situation! In the past to have a child was a blessing of the gods, but in today's world it has become a burden. Instead of giving the child love and care, parents themselves give it in the care of someone who they do not even know. To the innocent child, the person who looks after them becomes the mother or father. When the children start growing up they do not listen to the parents and are unmanageable and the parents wonder why. Who is to blame the children or the parents? Are parents not responsible for this kind of behavior of their child?

The philosophical aspect of responsibilities of parents is that man is not only a material social being but also spiritual. Spiritual consciousness of man which can also be called soul is like electric current flowing inside a wire that can be touched without getting a shock. This is because the surface of the wire is insulated and we cannot feel the current flowing inside it. If we want to feel the current we have to touch the naked wire and feel the shock. Likewise, to feel the flow of spiritual consciousness between parents and children there has to always be interaction between them; otherwise, their relationship will be just like the current flowing inside an insulated wire. The special spiritual relationship flowing between the parents and children can be called consciousness or soul. That is why it is said that even if a person departs from the world their spirit is present in their children and grand children. This means that parents should treat their children as if they were treating themselves. We might have heard people complimenting a child as to how they look like their parents or their split image. Likewise, we might have also heard how a child looks and acts like their grandparents. That is why the old saying goes "The child is the father of man." Parents have many important responsibilities towards their children because they are the ones who carry on the family lineage. In today's world many a mother does not have time or wants to breast feed her child. Mothers forget the great benefits of breast-feeding which creates a strong binding relationship with the child. It is this bond between mother and child that keeps them together for the rest of their lives. When parents neglect and deprive their children of love and affection what guarantee is there that their children will look after them in their old age?

The practical and moral aspects of parental responsibilities towards children are that before a couple has children they should seriously discuss the pros and cons of the matter. The coming child should not be a product of lust but of love. They should think of all the responsibilities that they have to face after a child is born. A child should never feel neglected and unwanted. Right from an early age parents should spend a lot of time discussing with their children about life and its meaning to develop a deep relationship between them.

To avoid neglecting a child and giving it a lot of love and affection parents should stay with the child's grandparents or nearby so that they can look after their grand children. The grandparents would be very happy and delighted to look after their grand children. If grandparents got this opportunity they would care for them better than their parents. The experienced grandparents would teach the grandchildren more than what they taught their parents. They would get the same love and affection that their parents got and even more. Only love, peace and harmony would prevail in a house where grandparents, grand children and their parents stay together. If parents want to raise their children to be perfect human beings then they should never isolate their children from their grandparents because when they do this they will only harm themselves.

As children are growing up the parents should interact with them on all kinds of subjects and answer all their questions. If they are raised and brought up in this manner they would not only be good children but also perfect citizens. After all is it not the duty and desire of parents to make their children better then themselves. If they have succeeded in doing this then they have done their duty. Their children would also look after them when they get old which I am sure is the desire of all parents. In the past mothers would oil and massage the children and as they started growing up the father would massage the son and the son would massage the father. Likewise, the mother would massage the daughter and the daughter would massage the mother. As they massaged each other they would interact on all kinds of subjects. In this way a strong relationship developed between the parents and children. The mother would tell her daughter; once she got married she should look after her mother in-law as if she were her own mother. By following the mother's advice sometimes a better relationship developed between the mother in-law and daughter in-law which was sometimes stronger than between the mother and son.

Importance of Various Days:

There are millions of planets in the sky but the astrologers have given importance to only nine of them because of their qualities. Out of the nine seven have been named after the days of the week which represents the important quality of the Planet. The following Sanskrit verse describes the qualities of the planets.

Graha rajyam prayachanti graha rajya haranti ch:
Grahairbrtaimind sarwa trailokayam sacharataram:

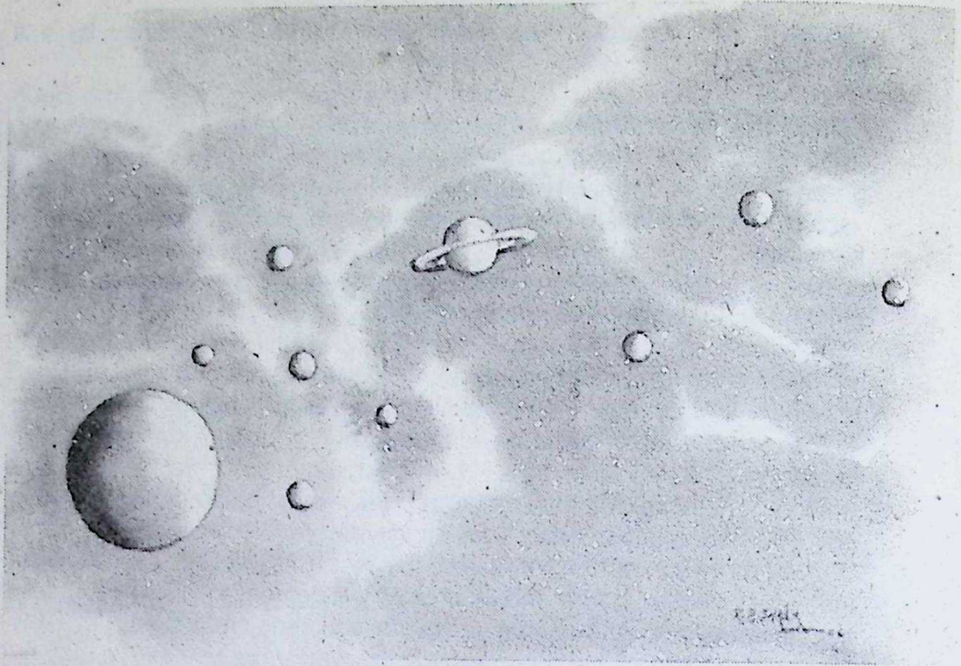
This means if a planet is in favor of a person they can gain a kingdom and if they are not then you can lose a kingdom. All the three worlds (heaven, earth and hell) are under the influence of these planets and their names and the days of the week they represent are as follows-

1) "Ravi" or Sunday is the first day of the week. In Sanskrit, Ravi means the planet Sun. He is also known by many other names like *Aditya,* Ark, *Aryam Pawak* etc. He is the first and foremost because all other planets revolve around him. His vehicle is a one-wheel chariot supported by twelve spokes. The one wheel represents a year and the twelve spokes the twelve months of a year. Seven horses draw the chariot representing the seven days of the week or the seven colors of the rainbow. Of the five elements he represents fire. Sunday is a good day to worship Lord Shiva or powerful goddesses. As Ravi is red in color it is good to wear red clothes and a good day to start new enterprises.
2) Som or Monday is the second day of the week. In Sanskrit, *Som* means the planet moon. *Som Ras* represents wine the favorite drink of the gods. It also represents *Amrit* or nectar. He is also called *Indu* and is known by many other names. He is also known as the god of love and sex because no matter how much sex he has he is not satisfied. His sexual urge is so great that he has twenty-seven wives. Among the five elements, he represents water, which cools everything. A person born on this day will get respect, power and wealth. His vehicle is a chariot drawn by ten deer. As he is white in color it is good to wear white clothes and fast on this day and worship Goddess *Parvati*.
3) *Manga*" or Tuesday is the third day of the week. In Sanskrit, *Mangal* means the planet Mars. Amongst the five elements he represents fire. *Mangal* is the protector of righteousness, knowledge and mutual understanding. He has red hair and his vehicle is a sheep. As his hair is red in color he is happy when red clothes are worn on this day. Any person favored by him will be free from debts, fears, anxiety and blessed with good health, wealth and happiness. This is a good day to worship Lord *Ganesh*. New ventures should not be started on this day. That is probably why our ancestors had a saying if people met on a Tuesday or

departed on a Saturday they would either suffer from fever or have a stomach ache.

4) "Budh" or Wednesday is the fourth day of the week. In Sanskrit, *Budh* means the planet Mercury. Amongst the five elements he represents earth. He is the king of knowledge and Lord of all the planets. He is green in color and is happy when green clothes are worn on this day. His vehicle is a lion. He is the son of *Som* and *Vrihashpati*. A person seeking knowledge, good qualities and education should start on this day. A person who helps the poor, needy and destitute on this day will be blessed abundantly.
5) "Vrihaspati" 0r Thursday is the fifth day of the week, In Sanskrit,. *Vrihaspati* means the planet Jupiter. He is the teacher of all the gods and is known as *Gurudev*. He is yellow in color and is happy when yellow clothes are worn on this day. His vehicle is a chariot drawn by eight horses and is the king of all the scriptures. If we want knowledge, wisdom, good health and seek children he should be worshipped on this day. If we worship our family deity on this day we will be blessed.
6) "Sukra" or Friday is the sixth day of the week. In Sanskrit, *Sukra means* the planet Venus and he the teacher of the demons He is white in color and is pleased when a person wears white clothes and fasts on this day. Amongst the five elements he represents water. His vehicle is a chariot drawn by eight horses. Amongst all the planets he is the most favorable so if we want love, care and affection we should remember him on this day. On this day if Goddess *Indrani* is worshipped she will bless us.
7) "*Sani*" or Saturday is the seventh day of the week. In Sanskrit *Sani* means the planet Saturn. He is the son of Surya and is black in color, his vehicle is a vulture. Amongst the five elements, he represents air. He is the god of knowledge, ignorance, distress, happiness, consciousness and unconscious. Anyone who pleases him will be free from all kinds of distress so we should always try to please him. It is said if *Sani* looks anyone that person they will be destroyed. That is why he never looks at anyone but is always looking down. If we remember him on this day we will be blessed. This is the best day to worship Goddess *Bhagwati*.

Besides, the above-mentioned planets there are two others which are called *Rahu* and *Ketu*. They are sub planets or shades of the other planets. If a person is being blessed by some planet and all of a sudden they start having problems it is because one of these two planets has come in between the person and the planet that was favoring them. Such a person will have problems for a few days followed by happiness.



According to astrology a person's fate depends not only on the day they are born but also on the position of the planets. That is why before starting or doing anything we should take our horoscope to an astrologer to seek his advice so that he can guide us of the coming good and bad events. In ancient times, people consulted their astrologer regularly and if they knew they were going to die in an un-auspicious moment they would stop death. We can read in the Mahabharata when *Vhisma Pitama* was going to die the sun was in the southern hemisphere and it was inauspicious. So he stopped his own death till the sun moved to the northern *hemisphere.*

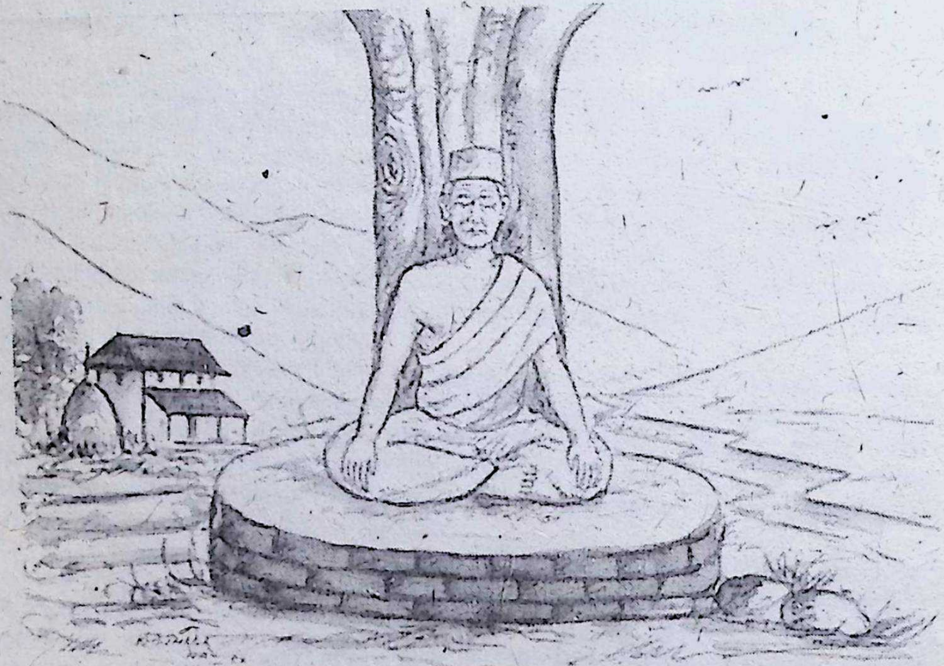
Astrology is a very interesting subject to study. We should not discard it as blind belief without first understanding its importance. These days it is difficult to find a well-versed astrologer who can read a horoscope and forecast the coming events correctly and when they do it usually turns out to be false. If this subject is studied seriously it can reveal a lot of very interesting secrets about us. This fact is proved by the following story.

In days of antiquity there was a very learned and famous astrologer called *Parasar*. One day while he was seriously consulting his astrological charts, he learnt that if he could impregnate a woman in a coming auspicious moment a boy would be born from her who would later on become a very famous scholar. Later on, while he was walking along the Ganges river he saw the auspicious moment approaching. He looked around to see who he could impregnate when all of a sudden he saw young fisher woman who smelt like a fish rowing a boat. As the auspicious moment was nearing he got into the boat and impregnated her in the middle of the Ganges River. And the child born from this impregnation became the very famous and a learned scholar *Vyas* who wrote the eighteen *Purands* and found out the secrets of the four Vedas. From this story we should understand the importance of astrology to find out the auspicious and inauspicious moments that will affect our lives.

Four stages of life

When we are born in this world we are an innocent child but as we start growing up our body and mind also grows and develops. During our childhood we pick up good and bad habits from our friends and others. We pass our days without any worries or cares. We eat what we like, sleep where we like and mix with who we like. The wise and practical *Rishis* and *Munis* of Hinduism were very concerned about this care free life of a growing boy because they were worried that he may pick up bad habits which would ruin his life. So to regulate the boy's life right from childhood, they took religious support by introducing the *Vrata Vandha* sacrament after which the boy had to obey rules and live a disciplined life as a responsible member of the family. The rules were made in such a way that even the society would enforce them so that the boy would grow up to be a perfect human being.

In the Vishnu *Purand,* part 3 chapters 9 it is written a man life has been divided into four different stages. They are *Brahmacharya* ashram, *Grihastha* ashram, *Banaprashthan* ashram and *Sanyas* ashram.



After a boy is born and reaches the age of seven or eight the *Vrata Vandh* ceremony is performed on him, so that he can enter the *Brahmacharya* ashram the first stage of life. After the ceremony is over, he is sent to a *Gurukul* which was just like the boarding schools of today where he is taught not only reading, writing and arithmetic but also many other practical arts that he could use in life. At the same time he is also taught the importance of controlling his sexual urges so that he can be a perfect person. After the boy has studied in the *Gurukul* for seventeen or eighteen years, he has completed the present day equivalent of a bachelor's degree and returns home to enter the *Grihastha* ashram the second stage of life. As this stage of life is the most difficult of the four stages *Manusmriti* chapter 4 verse 257 provides the guidelines to pass it successfully.

Maharshipitridewanam gatwasnrinya yathabidi:
Putra: sarwam samasajya wasaynmadhyisthamashrit:

This means only after a son has worshipped the Rishis, ancestors and the gods through sacred rituals he will be free from the debts he had to pay them. After paying the debts he can enter the *Grihastha* ashram.

According to the prevalent custom, the parents of the young man after he arrived home got him married. After getting the son married the father told the son that he was retiring from all worldly activities and handed all the family responsibilities to him. The father told him from today you have to look after the family members and carry on all the financial and social responsibilities. You also have to serve the poor and needy as if they were Gods. Suddenly a young man has to face all these worldly responsibilities that he has never faced before. This stage in life would decide whether he was a good successful person. So he had to think and evaluate every action he took and the consequences it had.

After the father hands over all the social and economic responsibilities of the family to his son, he enters the *Banaprasthan* ashram the third stage of life. In the past it was a practice to enter this stage before seeing the grand children so that it would free him from being attached with them and exit from the material world with ease. In this stage of life a person passed their days in prayer and meditation. To get peace and harmony was the main purpose so that they could enter the *Sanyas* ashram the fourth stage of life.

In the fourth and final stage of life he should try to communicate with his inner soul because before he had little or no time to understand them. In this stage he has all the time in the world and should pass his days in peace and harmony in such a way that is was physically present in the world but mentally has left it. The following verse guides a person how they should pass days in this stage.

Shaisavyasbhyastabidhanam youbane bisayasinam:
Bardhakya munibritinam yogenante tanu tyajet:

This means when we were children we studied and learnt a lot. In our youth we experienced a lot of joy and sorrows. In old age we meditate and pray like the sages. Now through deep meditation and yoga we should be able to leave this body and go to heaven. Only those who pass the journey of life in this manner can be called a successful person.

The philosophical aspect of the four stages of life is that any person who passes his life through these stages will be a perfect human being. In the *Brahmacharya,* stage he studies and gains a lot of knowledge to face the challenges of the *Grihastha* stage,. In the *Grihastha* stage he takes the responsibilities of looking after the parents, family members and other economic and social responsibilities. He also looks after the poor needy and the destitute. In the *Banaprasthan* he hands over all worldly responsibilities to his son and retires from active life to do the things he always wanted to do and prepares to enter the *Sanyas* stage. Maybe the philosophers of Hinduism saw that once old age set in on a person their five active and five sense organs would start weakening. Maybe they knew this was Mother Nature's way of telling him "Prepare your-self to gradually fade away and depart from this world. Your eye sight is weak, you hear less, you cannot enjoy food, and your digestive system is weak. You cannot excrete properly. Likewise, your joints pain,, your back aches. Mentally, you maybe sound but physically you are getting weak so prepare to depart from this world in a graceful manner by handing all the worldly responsibilities to your children and "Prepare to be with me." That is why before all the ten organs completely collapsed the Hindus prepared themselves to slowly leave the world to enter the Sanyas stage by denouncing everything to live in isolation. Maybe the philosophers saw that once a person starts getting old and weak they would be a burden on their children. So to avoid the mistreatments from their children, they left their homes gracefully. That is why a person who had passed the four stages of life never thought or fell into bad habits but would always be kind, loving and patient till their dying days. They would be so perfect that they could be presented to the gods.

But, in today's materialistic world, due to lack of good moral based education, human values, brotherly love is slowly being overtaken by all kinds of violence, jealousy and unrest. There is nothing but fear and intolerance that is taking the society to all kinds of problems. This rise in the chaotic condition in the world is because we are forgetting our moral values and inherited culture and copying others, tastes, fashion and styles. The habit of not reading the scriptures, respecting the elders and loving the young ones is responsible for bringing about these conditions. If this situation is not controlled immediately very soon the whole world will be completely destroyed. not by anyone else, but human beings themselves.

The only reality in our lives is that one day we all have to die and leave this world. As long as we are alive a distinction is made between the rich and the poor, strong and the weak. Some have all the comforts and luxuries while others are poor and helpless. This is the harsh reality of life between the haves and the have-nots. The rich and the powerful look down on the poor and needy. Yet both these groups have to face the same harsh reality of death from which nobody can escape. When death comes to take them away it does not look at their status. We can say death is the equalizer or the leveler of everyone. Once death takes a person away they will be remembered as a good or a bad person that is why a person should always try to be a good person. They will not only be remembered by the country they live in but by the whole world. We can see for example Buddha, Ram, Krishna, Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and many others who have left this world long ago but are still remembered with admiration and respect. So as long as we are living in the world, we should behave like good human being so that even after we have passed away people will remember us with fond memories. That is why our Sages and *Rishis* made it mandatory that every male member of the society should pass through the four stages of life.

Be aware of the devil in you

When a mother gives birth to a child, it is helpless and innocent. As the child starts growing up its body and mind also grow, and develops. And as it continues growing, it starts thinking I am the strongest and wisest person in the world but does not realize that just growing up does not mean maturing mentally.

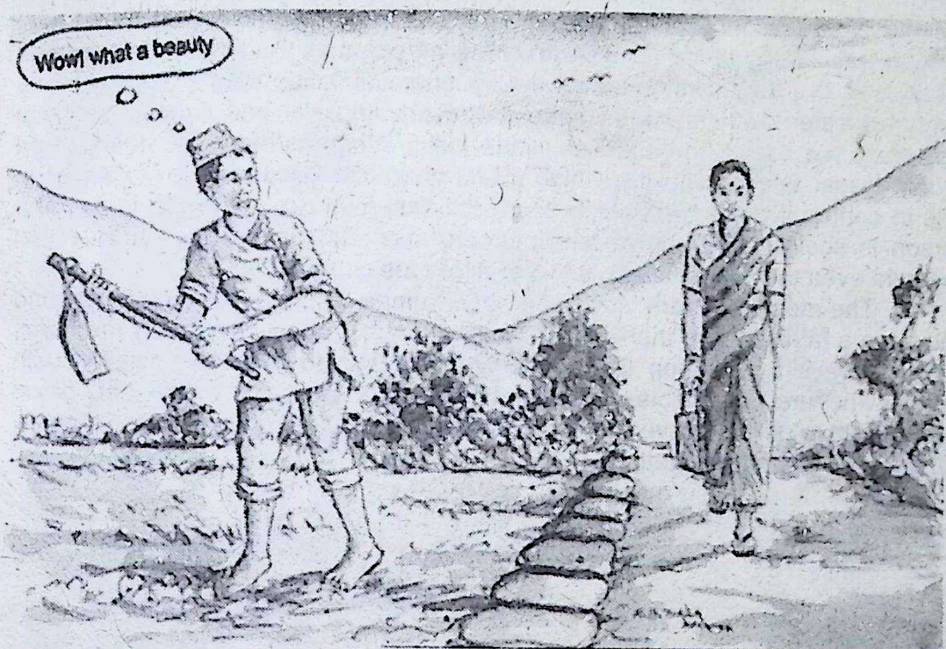
To be a successful person in the journey of life, a person has to face many hurdles and challenges. Our *Rishis* and *Munis* had faced and seen these challenges and they did not want the coming generations to face them. So they studied and experimented with human behavior and developed guidelines based on their findings. This search of theirs to make a person successful led them to discover that there are six enemies inside every human being. If we follow their teachings and overcome these six enemies inside us we can become a perfect person and can travel the journey of life without any problems. Success or failure depends on how we interact with the different types of people in our daily life. If this interaction is good we will be happy even when we are breathing our last. To enjoy this bliss and happiness we must always control our mind and be conscious of what we are saying and doing. The six enemies that the *Rishi Munis* discovered inside all human beings are as follows: (1) Lust, (2) Anger, (3) Greed, (4) Passion, (5) Pride, and (6) Envy.

1) Lust or sexual desire is an enemy inside us that we must control. We must enjoy sex and have it in a healthy and proper manner and not over indulge in it. If sexual desire takes control over us, we will be ruined. People who have no control over lust become its victim. Every day we can see, read and hear about sexual crimes like rape and murders. This sexual lust not only ruins the life of the victim but also the life of the committer of the crime and their family for the rest of their lives.
2) Anger is a very bad enemy because it makes us blind. When we are angry, we cannot reason and think properly. We cannot distinguish what is right or wrong. If we lose our senses and take abrupt decisions without thinking properly then we can do or say something so terrible that no matter how much we repent we cannot forgive ourselves for the rest of our lives. That is why before saying or doing anything we should be cool and calm.
3) Greed is an enemy which makes us look at others possessions with a desire to posses them. Nobody trusts a greedy person because they may steal or hatch a plot to get what they want.
4) Passion makes us fall madly in love with a person or thing. A passionate person cannot do anything in a proper manner because passion overtakes them and makes them blind. Passion is such a terrible enemy that it makes us go after a person or thing blindly. As long as we are with that person or in a place we forget how time has passed and realize what we have neglected or lost when it is too late.
5) Pride makes us feel that we are better and greater than anyone else in

every way. Proud people think and behave towards others in a degrading manner. A person suffering from this complex is neglected by everyone and nobody likes them. Such a person lives a life of isolation and is quietly waiting early death. A proud person is too self-centered to think about what others think of them.

6) Envy makes us jealous of what others have. We are never satisfied with what we have. An envious person cannot progress successfully nor will let others. They are like a monkey who cannot make his own home and destroys others.

Realizing that we human beings possess these six enemies inside us the Hindu philosophers and sages warned us to be careful of them so that we can travel the journey of life successfully. If a person wants to live a happy and a successful life they must control these enemies.



We have to be positive and practical in our approach to life. If we use our knowledge for the destruction of the world by creating an environment of uncertainty and fear we will be called a devil. A person's mind has the power to distinguish what is good and bad. A person, who uses his mind in the right manner, is equivalent to god. But if a person uses it for the ill of the world he is called a devil. Scientists are all the time conducting hundreds of experiments to invent all kinds of things for the betterment of mankind. Constructive inventions that are used in a negative manner destroy not only mankind but also the world.

We can read how the atomic energy was used during the Second World War and the catastrophe it caused is still being seen and felt more than a half a century later. When that same atomic energy is being used today in the right manner it is benefiting the whole world. That is why human beings should use their minds discretionary power correctly.

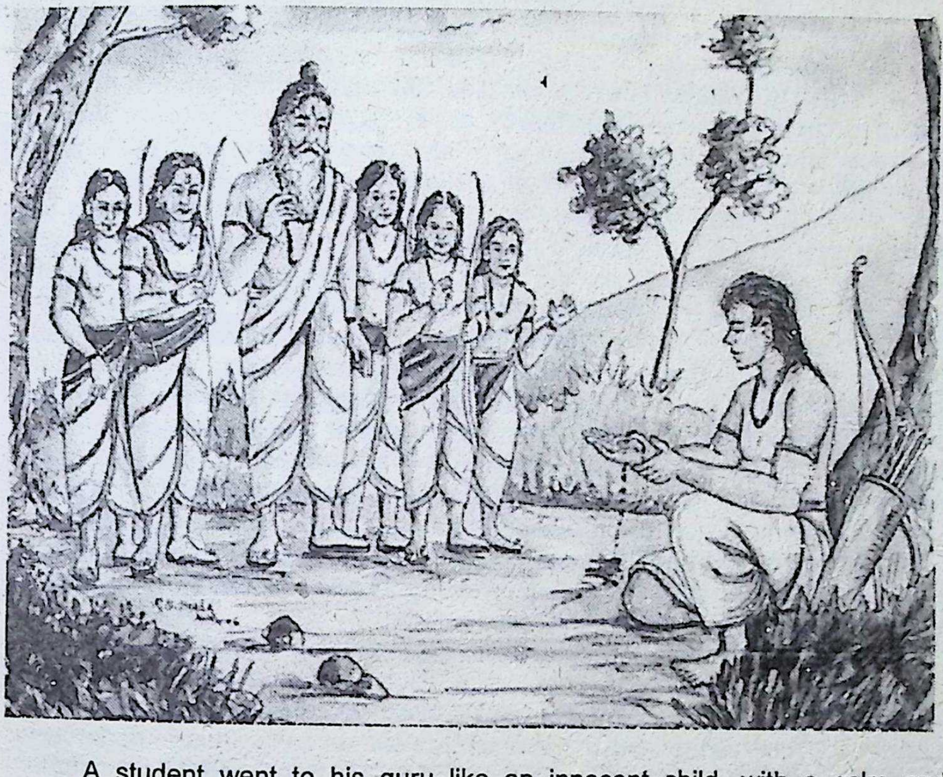
Hindu philosophers say the journey of life of a human being is a journey through the universe. They call the human mind universe. A person who uses his mind for the betterment of the world will be recognized as a good human being like Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and so many others. The philosophy of using our mind to control the six enemies inside us is that we should think positively for the betterment of the world and mankind. When we were born in the world we were pure and innocent. And at the time of leaving the world we are not innocent but have been corrupted. What is the reason for this change in human behavior? Nobody thinks about this matter and it is a grave question. Well the answer is a person gets corrupted as they travel through the journey of life because they are attracted by the worldly things. And because of this they cannot control the six enemies inside them. We find many highly educated and renowned people who are immoral and corrupt because they could not control the enemies inside them. Whereas there are uneducated people lesser known who have high moral character because they have been able to control the enemies inside them. But this does not mean just because a person is socially well known, philanthropic and affluent that they are perfect because even they can have negative qualities inside them.

The most important factor of a good human being is to be morally sound and have a family where there is love, peace and harmony. The family members should always try to keep this harmony. They should avoid associating with people who are unsociable and bad. It is said a family that eats and prays together stays united forever, As long as there is this kind of unity in the family it will always be bonded together.

Guru: Enlightener of the inner eye

A guru is a teacher who imparts education, knowledge and other skills to his students. There are three kinds of gurus; The first guru in our life is our parents who raise and teach us how to behave and interact in daily life. Our second guru is school and college teachers who educate us. Our third guru, is the family priest who passes on religious mantras in our ears and oversee all the family religious ceremonies. Through the mantra called *Guru Mantra*, he teaches us hidden mysteries. Just as we see and identify things of the world with our eyes a guru opens our minds inner eye to give us knowledge. Hinduism gives so much importance to a guru that even the gods have *Gurudev Vrihaspati* as their guru.

In the past, students chose their gurus and gurus chose their students. When the temperaments and attitudes of the guru and student were amicable, the guru student relationship materialized.



A student went to his guru like an innocent child, with a calm and peaceful mind full of enthusiasm to learn. The student's innocence and his quest for knowledge compel the guru to take the student under his wing. The student is like a lump of clay and the guru is like a potter who can make a product good or bad. Likewise, a guru can also make his student worthy or unworthy. It is the duty of a guru to make the student a perfect scholar and a good human being, who will be a loyal citizen of the society and the country. If a student is mischievous, disobedient and arrogant in spite of the gurus efforts to calm him down then the guru can refuse to teach such a student. That is why a student should be like a beautiful flower always attracting the guru's love and affection. A student should always respect and honor the guru and seek knowledge humbly. When a guru sees this attitude of a student he will be compelled to take keen interest in teaching such a student. When a student goes to a guru to seek knowledge he should be like a thirsty person looking for water, seeking more and more knowledge from the guru. In the past a guru would only take the *Gurudakshina* (fee) after a student had completed his education. There are many stories based on the guru student relationship. Amongst them the most interesting and popular one is the story found in the Mahabharata, of *Guru Dronacharya* and *Eklavya.*

Eklavya was a smart young boy who wanted to learn archery, so he went to *Dronacharya* the most famous archery guru of the time and requested him to teach him archery. The guru asked him which caste he belonged to? When *Eklavya* replied he was from the *Sudra* caste. *Dronacharya* told him that he could not teach archery to a person from that caste. *Eklavya* was disappointed with the gurus reply and was returning home when all of a sudden he thought, why not make a statue of guru *Dronacharya* from clay and practice archery in front of it.

One day while *Eklavya* was practicing archery a dog suddenly came and started barking at him. He got very angry at the dog's persistent barking, so in anger he shot seven arrows into the dog's mouth. After the dog was hit by the arrows it could not close its mouth and ran back to its master. The dog belonged to the five *Pandav* princes, who had come to the forest to hunt. When *Arjun* saw the dog with seven arrows in its mouth he was shocked and amazed at the archer's skill. He thought to himself, guru *Dronachárya* in the presence of a huge assembly had declared him not only to be his best student but the greatest archer and there was no one better than him. He said to himself, I could not have shot the arrows so skillfully; there must be a greater archer than me. So he went to guru *Dronacharya* and asked him had he not declared him to be the greatest archer in front of everyone? He told him about what he had witnessed and said there was an archer better than him. was surprised at what Arjun said so he decided to go and find out who the archer was.

In the forest *Dronacharya* saw *Eklavya* practicing archery. When *Eklavya* saw *Dronacharya* he humbly bowed to him. *Dronacharya* asked him who taught you archery and what was the guru's name. *Eklavya* said "You are my guru and showed *Dronacharya* his statue." *Dronacharya* did not know what to do because he recalled how in front of everyone he had declared *Arjun* to be his best student and the greatest archer. He was perplexed and could not go back on his word. So he asked *Eklavya* to give him *Gurudakshina* (the fee a student gives to his guru upon completion of education). Eklavya politely replied and said, "Respected guru, ask for anything and I will give it you." *Dronacharya* replied "I want your right hand thumb." *Eklavya* without any hesitation cut off the thumb of his right hand and humbly offered it to *Dronacharya*. In the past this was the kind of relationship that existed between a guru and a student. Even though *Dronacharya* had not taught *Eklavya* archery yet he happily offered his thumb as *Gurudakshina*.

If a Guru took *Gurudakshina* before teaching a student then the student would take advantage of the guru and be disrespectful to him.
That is why in the past a guru would only take *Gurudakshina* after a student completed his education and it was the duty of students to give it to him. This practice of giving *Gurdakshina* after completing the education developed a good relationship between the guru and students. The guru's duty was to make his students better than him. Likewise, it was also the duty of students to fulfill the dreams of their gurus. When students maintained this kind of relationship with their gurus they were blessed. The following verse is sung in praise of gurus

Gurubrahmma Guruvishnugururdevo Maheshwora:
Guru: sakshyat parabrahmam tasmai shreeguruve nam:

This means *Brahmma* is guru. Vishnu is guru. And *Maheshwor* is guru. Besides these three gurus there are many other gurus who are our gurus. But the greatest guru of them all is the unseen *Brahmma*. That is why a guru should always be honored and respected.

A student never stops learning and is always gaining knowledge. We can read in the Mahabharata how *Arjun* refused to raise his weapon against the *Kauravas* in the battlefield. He raised his weapon only after Lord Krishna preached to him the duty of a person from the *Chetri* caste which *Arjun* belonged to. Lord Krishna also explained to him the meaning of life and death. This sermon that Lord Krishna gave *Arjun* in the battlefield is known as the *Gita*. Even though *Arjun* had studied and passed from the *Gurukul* yet Lord Krishna had to teach him the duties of a *Chetri*. In this way Lord Krishna became *Arjun's* guru. A student should always look up to his guru as a father who gives him knowledge and the guru's wife as his guru mother and their children as brothers and sisters. As gurus play a very important role in Hindu society, the full moon night of July is called Guru *Purnima* in honor of Gurus and on this day Hindu students worship their gurus.

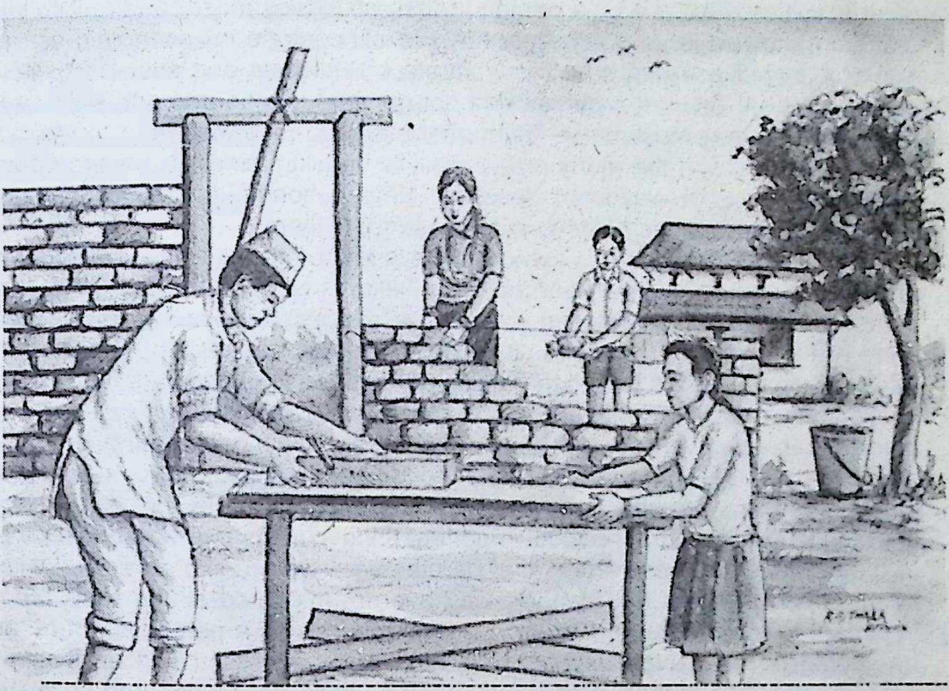
The philosophical aspect of a guru is that they not only teach students' wisdom and knowledge, but also how to become successful, disciplined and well-mannered citizens by instilling moral values in them. The students of today are the future builders of the society and country. They will be its leaders and it will be their responsibility to lead the country to the path of peace and prosperity. So in order to make the students competent and efficient, the country must have highly qualified teachers, perfect education system and a sound environment. The national policy of the country should be to invest a major portion of the annual budget on producing good gurus and students. Only when such an environment is present students will not only be well educated, but also loyal citizens who will not only look after their self interest but work for the common good of the society and the nation. In order to attract good and qualified people into the teaching profession, the government must make it a highly respected and paid profession with benefits.

A guru not only imparts knowledge to students but also guides them to travel the journey of life successfully. It is the duty of a student to choose the right guru and honestly try to gain perfect knowledge from him. Knowledge thus gained can never be compared with the *Gurudakshina* he gives to the guru. The real *Gurudakshina* will be when a student is successful, shows respect and travels the journey of life honestly without evil habits and thoughts. A guru who teaches his students with the hope of getting *Gurudakshina* is not a true guru. In the past a guru not only taught many subjects but also imparted moral and spiritual values. Emphasis was laid on students to perform their duties to their country, society and family honestly. Gurus did not sell education like it is being sold today. These days' students not only disrespect their gurus but also frown on them and take advantage of them. This is because education has become a business commodity for sale. It can be said that if a student pays for his education before completing it then he can demand the type of education he wants. To bring back education to its past esteem a genuine guru student relationship that existed in the past is essential.

Advantages of mastering arts and skills

All human beings born in the world want to be successful and famous. To achieve this goal a person must not only be clever and intelligent, but also know many arts and skills. Such a person will never depend on anyone because he is confident that he can do any kind of work successfully. Because of his confidence he is always ready to face all kinds of difficulties and challenges to be successful.

The importance of sex education and knowledge of arts and skills taught by *Vatsayan Rishi* thousand of years ago in his book titled "*Kamasutra*" are still valid today. Upgrading knowledge and skills in this modern world is a routine practice in different business houses so that the demands of the competitive world can be met. Managers and administrators from time to time are given skill development trainings to build self-confidence.



A person who has mastered all kinds of skills, art of sex, art of management, art of debating and so on is highly respected and is always in demand. Such a person can choose and do anything they like perfectly whether it is a commodity they want to buy or a profession they want to take up and even choosing a life partner. They get the best. Such a person is a wholesome human

The *Vaisya* caste represents the thighs, which takes us from one place to another. That is why it is the duty of this caste to carry on trade, commerce and agriculture of the country to make it economically rich and prosperous.

The *Sudra caste* represents the feet, without its support we cannot go from one place to another. This caste serves the society and the country so that it can move ahead. Their duty is to serve the three above mentioned castes.

Hindu society was ideally divided into four different castes according to their work and duty. But with the passage of time this ideally divided society was penetrated by many evils, which further fragmented the four castes into high caste, low caste, sub castes, untouchables and so on. This eventually brought about many unrests and conflict in the society. The main reason for this fragmentation and conflict was because of the fight between the Brahmans and the *Chetris*. We read about this conflict in the Vedas and *Purans*. The *Brahamans* and *Chetris* deviated from their caste duty of imparting knowledge and protection and started encroaching upon each other's duties and responsibilities. Because of the infighting between these castes many other religions originated from Hinduism like Jainism, Sikhism and *Buddhism.* This is because Hindu society became polluted when people forgot to perform their rights and duties that their castes had bestowed upon them. Low caste people and untouchables who were discriminated by the high caste entered into these new religions where there was no discrimination and they were welcomed with open arms.

Parsuram was born in the Brahman caste which did not permit its members to raise arms. He was forced to raise arms because the *Chetri* caste did not do their duty to protect the society. He fought a bloody battle against the *Chetris* and established peace and justice in the society.

Viswamitra was born in the *Chetri* caste but wanted to become a Brahman. So he meditated, fasted, did penance and a lot of charity. And the result was that he reached *Brahmanhood.* This story shows us that a truly dedicated person can enter into another caste.

The philosophical aspects of the four castes in Hinduism are that everyone living in the society was taught to perform their respected duties honestly. If every caste kept on performing their duty they could have specialized in their own occupation. If any problems or weaknesses rose in their occupation they could solve it themselves. The more a Brahman shared his knowledge and skills with others the more perfect and knowledgeable he became. Likewise, if a king or soldier performed his duty honestly the *Chetri* would be perfect in his occupation. Likewise if a *Vaisya* performed his duties in commerce and industry the more perfect he would be. If a *Shudra* performed his duties to the society and pleased the people he would have done his duty honestly. Hindus should immediately learn from the past mistakes of the evils of caste system and treat everyone with equality and respect.

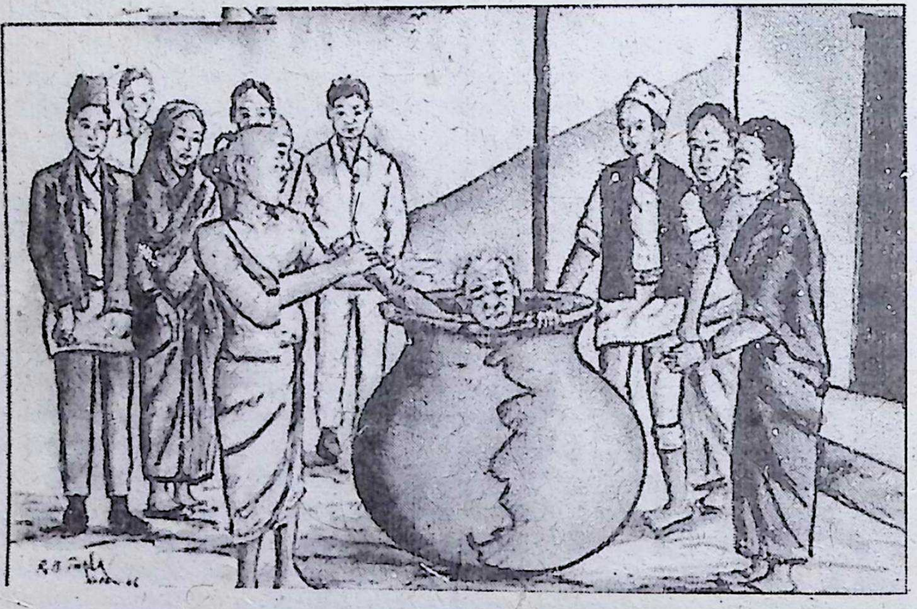
Only then an ideal society will be established otherwise there is a grave danger of Hinduism disintegrating and losing its very identity. Now day's people who discriminate on the basis of caste and untouchables are frowned upon and can invite problems. If people are divided and discriminated on the basis of their caste it is a heinous crime against mankind.

People were divided into different castes according to their occupation and inherited daily duties. If the caste system was accepted for its cultural and occupational value without any discrimination or inequality, everyone could live in peace and harmony and it would be an ideal society. Without understanding the cultural values of the caste system no one should be discriminated or frowned upon. Because of the distortion of the caste system and discriminatory practices against individuals based on their caste Hindus are being frowned upon.

Buda Puja: Honoring senior citizens

Hindus right from the time 0f their birth till their death are bound by many sacraments and rituals like *Chunda Karma*, *Vrata Vanda*, *Vivaha* and so on. These rituals are regularly performed on them till they reach the age of about twenty five years. Then no rituals are performed on them till they reach their late seventies till their ninety-ninth birthday. The rituals performed on them at this period in their life are called *Budha Puja* to honor them as gods. As Hindu society consists of many tribes, races and castes, the ritual of honoring the elderly is celebrated according to their customs and traditions. If a person from the Brahman or *Chetri* caste lives for eighty-four years a special reverence ceremony is held in their honor to show that the person has seen one thousand full moons and is accepted by the society as if he/she has reached a hundred years.

On the day of the *Budha Puja* ceremony religious rituals are performed on him/her and then they feed eighty-four Brahmins and give them alms. The alms should be given generously that the Brahmans will be pleased and bless him/her for their good health and happiness for the remaining days of their life. If he/she cannot afford to perform this in a grand manner then they can perform it according to their capacity. In some societies after a person crosses their eighty-fourth birthday they are considered to be a Sage or god.



The ceremony of honoring the senior citizen has to be celebrated in a grand manner as if he/she were getting married. All family members, friends and relatives have to be invited for the occasion. On the day of the ceremony he/she should be all dressed up like a bride or groom and approach the presiding priest to perform the ceremony. After the ceremony is finished all the guests give presents and bow to the senior citizen and get their blessings. Then he/she is taken to a *Ganesh* temple in a grand manner in a musical procession. The procession is lead by musicians followed by the senior citizen sitting on a chariot or a dandy surrounded by his/her children, grand children, great grand children and well wishers. After the procession is over everyone enjoys a grand feast. From that day onwards, he/she is honored and respected because they have achieved Godhead in human form.

The people from the *Newari* community celebrate *Budha Puja* ceremony three times in the following manner. For all celebrations family members, friends and relatives must be invited, no one should be left out.

The first ceremony is held when they are seventy-seven years, seven months, seven days, seven hours and seven minutes. This ceremony is known as *Bhimratharohan* or *Suryaratharohan*. It is celebrated during the day so that the senior citizen can meet the sun god *Surya*. After the priest has performed various rituals on them the he ties a white cotton turban around their head after that their children wash their feet and sprinkle some of the water on their tongue and over their body. Then the children bow to the parents and ask for forgiveness if they have hurt and troubled them in any way. After that other family members and relatives follow suit and then other friends and well wishers bow to him/her and offer gifts and ask him/her to bless them. After that he/she is placed in a chariot and taken to a *Ganesh* temple to offer *puja*. This ceremony is celebrated because it is believed that the person has crossed a very crucial and a dangerous period of their life which is called *Sadhe Sat Ko Dasa,* meaning seven and a half's of bad luck. An earring which has a pearl, coral and a turquoise stone is put on both his/her ears to show to the society this ceremony has been performed on them and after that everyone enjoys a grand feast.

Likewise, when a person reaches eighty-three years and four months the *Chandrarathoharan* ceremony is performed on him/her. It is held on a full moon night so that he/she can meet Chandra the moon god. After the ceremony a second earring is put next to the first one to prove that the ceremony has taken place. It is believed when this ceremony takes place the senior citizen has seen one thousand full moons. After the ceremony everyone enjoys a grand feast.

Likewise, when a person reaches eighty eight years, eight months, eight days, eight hours and eight minutes their *Devratharohan* ceremony is performed and a third ear ring is put next to the two earrings. After that everyone enjoys a grand feast.

Likewise when a person reaches ninety-nine years, nine months, nine days, nine hours and nine minuets another ceremony called *Maharathoharan* takes place. The senior citizen is put inside a big unbaked clay pot with its mouth covered with a cloth. Then the presiding priest just like a mid-wife at the time of a child's delivery helps the elderly person to break the pot and come out of it. The clay pot represents a mother and the elderly person a child. After the priest has brought out the elderly person from the pot he announces to those present "We must perform the birth rite ceremony of this new born child." Then the elderly person is bathed, dressed and make up is applied on them just like it is done on a newborn baby. After the ceremony is over everyone present enjoys a grand feast.

The philosophical aspect of the reverence ceremony is that when the children of the senior citizen are honoring and worshipping their parents their children should be present and take part in the celebrations. Their children should see how their parents are honoring their grandparents. When parents make their children partake in these ceremonies their children will also honor them in like manner when they get old. In all Hindu celebrations, family members, friends and relatives are invited informally but in this ceremony everyone has to be personally invited and persuaded to come for the celebrations.

The moral aspect of reverence to the elderly is that children not only respect their parents as parents but also as Gods. They wash their parent's feet and drink a few drops of the water and sprinkle some of it over their head and body as blessings. They present their parents with all kinds of gifts that their parents may have longed for all their lives. They ask for forgiveness if they had ever hurt them in any way. In this way children are showing their humbleness and gratitude to their parents for raising them and ensuring their success and blessing on them.

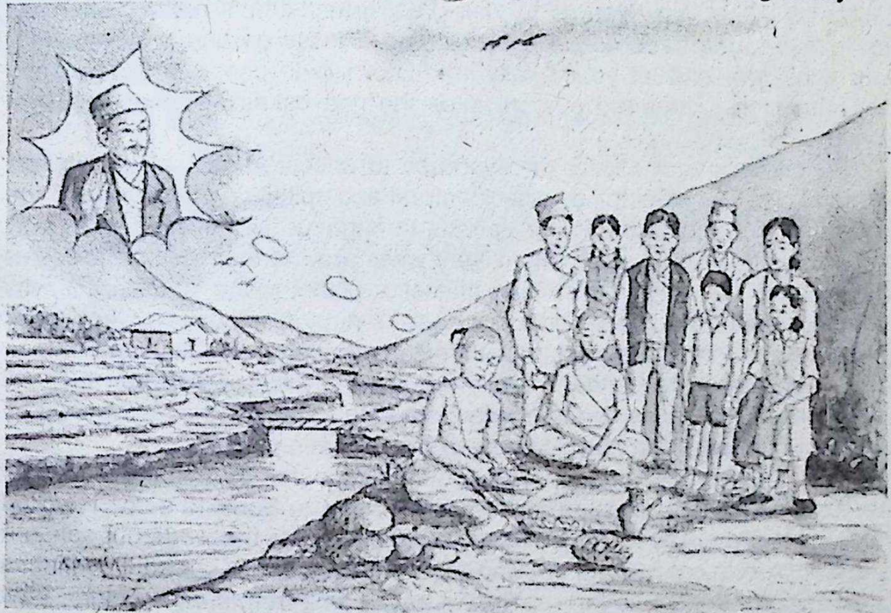
The reverence ceremony is a wonderful way of uniting family, friends and relatives that are spread all over the country. For many of them it is probably the first time they meet a cousin or an aunt that they have heard about but never met. This ceremony brings everyone to a common platform where they share their joys, sorrows and experiences.

Sacraments and rituals like the reverence ceremony are today being discarded and forgotten by the younger generation. They do not take time to care for themselves so how can they be expected to take time to care for others. To them maybe the elders have become a headache as they are always wheezing, sneezing and complaining. Who knows maybe even their children are anxiously waiting for their departure. In today's fast and materialistic world it is time and money that is important to the children and not to look after their elderly parents. The younger generation is forgetting that one day they will also be old and useless and maybe dumped and discarded by their children just like they discarded their parents. So time and again we are reminded of the immortal lines. "Whatever a person sows he will reap." So the young people of today should ask themselves what they are going to reap.

Shraddha: Reverence to Ancestors:

When a person is born in this world he/she is covered by the five elements which are earth, fire, water, space and air. As long as they are alive, they can adjust the effect of the four elements earth, fire, water and space. Like, if they feel cold, they can wear warm clothes or go to a warmer climate. If they feel hot they can go to a cooler place or wear light clothes. Likewise, if they feel thirsty, they can drink something to quench their thirst and if they are hungry they can eat food. But they have no control over the air element which they are constantly breathing because when it leaves their body they are dead.

As long as we are breathing air, we are in the living state but the minute we stop breathing we are dead. So our body is the house of the air that we are constantly breathing and when we stop breathing along with our identity the air's identity is also gone. Hindus believe when a person dies along with their last breath their soul or conscience also leaves their body and enters into the atmosphere. They believe this soul or conscience enters into an air bag the size of our thumb. As the soul or conscience leaves the human body which has been its home for so long it is but natural that it gets lost and frustrated in the atmosphere. In its frustration to find its home the soul moves all around in the atmosphere searching for its home. The extreme heat and cold of the atmosphere torments it. To prevent the soul of the departed person from suffering in this manner it is the duty of the departed person's living family



members to rescue it by giving it relief and peace. That is why on the twelfth day of the departed person's death anniversary family members perform the reverence ceremony called *Shraddha* to give peace to the tormented soul by offering rice cakes.

As far as possible the *Shraddha* ceremony should be performed on the banks of a flowing river or stream by the son of the departed person. The presiding priest performing the ceremony makes four rice cakes representing the departed soul, his father, grandfather and great grandfather. By reciting holy verses the priest makes the departed persons father, grandfather and great grandfather's soul to enter the rice cakes representing them. Then he makes the departed person's soul to enter the rice cake representing him. In this manner the priest has placed the departed person's soul at par with his departed ancestors. After that the priest calls upon Lord *Narayan* and Lord *Vishwodeva* to witness the ceremony. Then he takes a sharp knife if possible made from gold and cuts a piece of the rice cake representing the departed person and joins it to the cake representing his father and says "Now you go to your father's realm". It is believed when the priest cuts the rice cake representing the departed soul the air bag which had been keeping his soul breaks and his soul joins with his father's soul. After that the priest again cuts another piece of rice cake and joins it to the cake representing his grandfather and says "Now you go to your grandfather's realm." Then the priest takes the remaining last piece of cake representing the departed soul and joins it to the cake representing his great grandfather and says "Now you go to your great grandfather's realm." After that the priest prays to the three rice cakes and says "Please go and live peacefully with your ancestors and let your family members live in peace and harmony." Then the son of the departed person takes the rice cakes and places it in a flowing river or stream.

The philosophical aspect of reverence to ancestors is that a country's culture and civilization reflects its society's moral and spiritual values. Hindus are supposed to honor and respect their parents throughout their lives. That is why one of the strands of the cotton chord they wear around their neck represents their ancestor. Hindus believe that their ancestral planet is the sun. That is why when the sun enters the planet Virgo the earth is right in front of it. The Hindus believe, at that time their departed ancestors can see us and point us out to their friends as their loving descendent family members. That is why when the sun enters this planet Hindus celebrate *Sorha Shraddha* to please their ancestors by offering all kinds of goods in their memory to the Brahmin priests.

Hindu intellectuals and scholars should give importance to the continuity of these customs and traditions for their moral values. In Sanskrit a son is called *Atmaj* or soul. We can say that even after we die and leave the world our son and grandson will be present in it in our living form. In this manner our soul continues to enter our descendents forever just like we have come from our ancestors. That is why when our parents pass away from this world we should do the annual ancestral worship *Shraddha* as if they are present and living with us. If we forget our ancestors we will be cutting off our ancestral line and become like a rotten fruit fallen from a tree without an identity. Philosophers and sages of Hinduism gave continuity to the annual *Shraddha* ceremony in memory of our ancestors so that they may be respected like gods. Since we are the children of God we should do godly and just deeds in life.

The practical and moral aspect of the *Shraddha* ceremony is that it is the duty of family members to respect and honor their departed parents. After the parents die the children should send their tormented souls to the realms of their ancestors so that they can have peace. The living family members cannot imagine the sacrifices, problems and the difficulties that their parents faced to make them fit and capable. If we honor our parents by following these rituals and customs definitely our children will also remember us in like manner. Life is a game we play as long as we are alive, and leave it when we are dead. Nobody can change the cycle of life. Just like we celebrate our birthday with pomp and pleasure; likewise, we must celebrate our parent's annual death anniversary with grief and sadness. We should wish to be their children forever as long as we are going to be born in the world because they were such loving and caring parents. In our daily worship we should always remember them while we are bathing by washing the *Janai* (chord hung around the neck) because one of its strands represents them. Before eating our food we should remember them and offer some of it to them. Worshipping our ancestors by performing the *Shraddha* ceremony is very important. Its importance is written in the following verse:

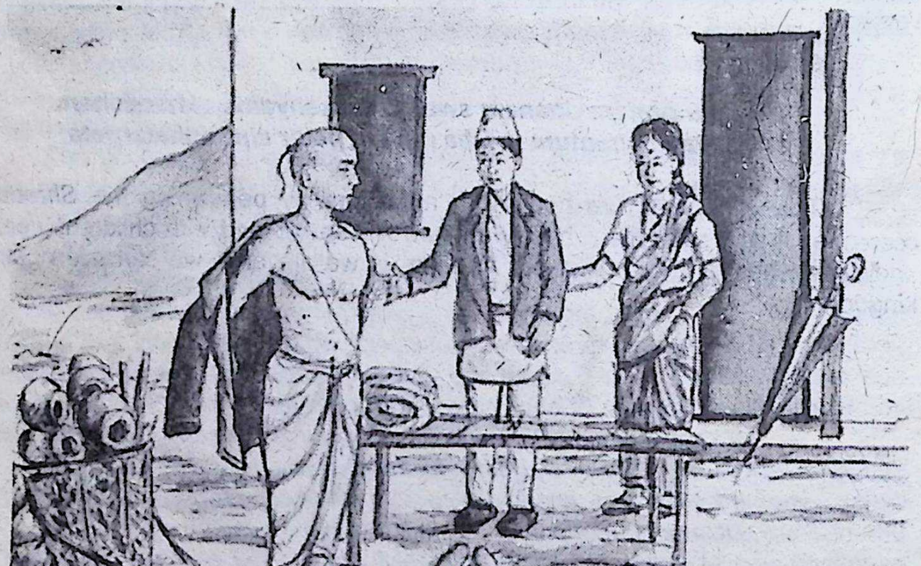
Ayu prajam dhanam swarga mokshyam sukhanecham:
Praya chantum thatha rajyam peter shraddhatarpeta:

This means: If we honor our ancestors by performing the *Shraddha* ceremony it will make them happy and we will be blessed with children, wealth, knowledge heaven and salvation. As long as we are alive we can even gain a kingdom.

Hidden Beauty in Giving:

Life and death has always been a mysterious subject for human beings right from the beginning of creation. Where did we come from, why we are doing all the different activities and where are we going after we die? Even though human beings have been in the world for thousands of years they have not been able to get the answer to these questions. But religious people believe that after we die we either go to heaven or hell according to the good and bad deeds we have done while we were alive. All human beings want to go to heaven and not hell. To go to heaven Hindus perform many rituals but the most important one is to donate a cow before he dies. They believe to get there they have to cross a river called *Waitarne*. The only way to cross this river is by holding the tail of a cow. The Hindus want to go to heaven because they believe that is where their ancestors are.

Hindus observe the *Shradha* ceremony on the thirteenth day after a person has passed away from the world. It is the duty of every Hindu to perform this ritual in memory of their departed parents so that their restless soul can have peace by going to heaven. When this ritual is being performed all the family members have to be present and take an active role in the ceremony so that they will carry on this tradition. In the *Garud Puran* the following verse is written regarding the importance of ancestral worship.



Ayu putran Yas swargam kirtim pustim·bala shreyam:
Pasun saukham dhanam chaiba prapnuyat pitripujnat:

This means when we pray and call upon our departed ancestors by offering them rice cakes we will be blessed with long life, children, fame, heaven, good deeds, nourishment, strength, beauty, animals, peace, prosperity and happiness. Before offering rice cakes to the ancestors the priest holds barley seeds, sesame seeds and *Kush* (dry grass) in his hands. Then he raises his hands above his head and requests the ancestors to be present by reciting the following verse.

Sarwatra shradhalakhayam yawo racham karotumay:
Tila rachyantosurad darva rachyantu rachysat:

This means let the area where the ancestral ritual is being performed be protected by the barley seed, let the sesame seed protect the area from evil spirits, and let the *Kush* (dry) grass protect the area from evil giants. After scattering the ritual area with the seeds and *Kush* grass for protection, the ancestors are called to be present. After that the priest requests the ancestors to enter the rice cakes. After the ancestors have entered their respective rice cakes the ceremony of worshipping the ancestors begins. In the Vedas it is written

Atray pitaro madhyadhom yatha bhagam brishyadhom:

This means, after the son has offered the rice cakes to the ancestors, the son should donate grains, foods, fruits and other items with an open heart to the priest. After donating the gifts the son has to request the priest and his departed ancestors to eat the food which has specially been prepared for them. This ritual of respecting the ancestors is called *Shraddha* meaning respect.

The priest is given goods used or worn by the departed person in their name. Sometimes gold, silver, jewelry and even land and houses are given to them. It is believed that when these items are given to the priest their godly powers transfer these goods to the departed soul. When ancestors are respected and worshipped in this manner they will be victorious and successful in the next world.

The philosophical aspect of s*hraddha* or giving offerings to the priest is that we are worried that the spirit of the departed soul will come and haunt us and make our life miserable. So to pacify their soul we offer gifts in their name for peace and harmony in the home and family. Another wonderful feature of this ceremony is that the clothes and other items that would have been thrown away are given to someone who can use them. When we give priests, offerings in the name of the departed soul they will not have to live a life of misery in the realm of their ancestors. So when we give gifts in the name of our departed ancestors let us give wholeheartedly.

There are two ways of giving offerings in the name of the departed soul. One is when we feed and clothe the poor and the destitute we will get their blessings from the core of their heart. The other type of giving is when we are happy with the way the priest has performed the ceremony and present him all kinds of gifts in gratitude. When we give in this manner the priest blesses us from the core of his heart and the departed soul in the realm of the ancestor's lives comfortable.

The practical and moral aspect of *shraddha* is that we should understand why Hindus give wealth, houses, land, valuable items and different kinds of edible items in the name of their departed ancestors. Only then we will appreciate the value of giving. Giving and sharing of wealth is a wonderful human characteristic. The beauty of giving is that the hand that gives is always higher than the hand that receives.

We are made up of five different elements which cover the world. As long as we are alive in the world we are stuck in it. We seek to enjoy eating, drinking, wearing different clothes and other comforts of life. But when we die and leave the world we have no connections with it and cannot use or enjoy anything from it. That is why the ritual of giving away all the things in the name of the departed soul is held to show to them that all the things they used and enjoyed are useless to them in their world. In this way it helps the departed soul to detach love and affection with this world and go to the higher realms by forgetting it and their possessions.

Religious scholars give more importance to giving up evil habits and vices rather than materialistic things. People, who give or donate things to show to the world how great they are or giving without a clear heart, do not get the benefits of giving with an open heart. When we can truly give up evil thoughts and habits from our hearts it is the best gift we can give. Giving in charity and serving the poor and the needy with a clear and conscience heart is the greatest gift a person can give.

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Book

"Hinduism" is an ideal way of life that was developed by the learned and knowledgeable people from the south, who lived close to the sea and exposed to sunshine, and those highly spiritual practitioners who lived in the Himalayan Mountains. Both these groups combined their knowledge as encoded in the Vedas and other Hindu scriptures, have been the results of their spiritual, social and cultural experience. It is written in the Hindu Scriptures:

Janmana Jayate Shudra:
Sanskard Dwij Uchyate:

Meaning every human being, born in this world, is raw and innocent. That is why so many rituals and sacraments are performed on a Hindu from birth to death to make them a perfect and an able human being, so that they can travel the journey of life successfully. When sacraments are performed on them they are being cleaned and refined. Otherwise they are like a diamond found in a mine, black and formless filled with many impurities, but after it has been cleaned, cut and polished become dazzling fit to be worn on a crown. Hinduism preaches love, peace, harmony and unity. An ideal Hindu, right from the time they get up in the morning till they go to bed remember with reverence their creator, country, ancestors and all the things that help them to pass their journey of life smoothly.

A nation does not slip into oblivion when it is conquered by an outside power, but it begins to die when it loses its culture and civilization. So if Hindus forget and discard their art, literature, music and cultural values, they will lose their identity.